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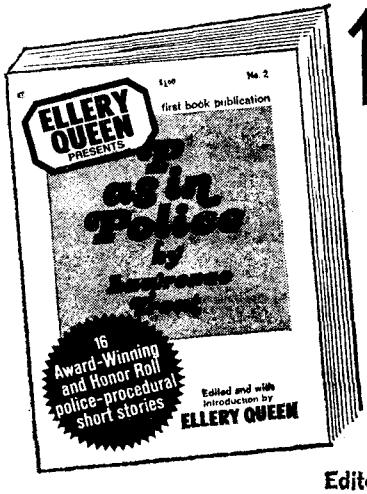

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THE SPY WHO TRAVELED WITH A COFFIN

by EDWARD D. HOCH

THE MAN IN THE BLACK RAINcoat was an assassin. He was, actually, quite skilled at his job, and he was employed only by the most important governments. He liked the work, especially the frequent travel that went with it. This day he was even enjoying Tokyo in the rain.

Harumi-Dori is a street that runs up from Tokyo Harbor to the grounds of the Imperial Palace. Crossed at two points by the new expressway, it perhaps symbolizes modern Japan as well as any other street in the capital. At least that was what the man in the black raincoat was thinking as he walked along it, past the Nishi Honganji Temple and the famous Kabuki-Za Theatre. The old Japan and the new—Kabuki and expressways.

He paused at the corner, decided that the rain had almost stopped, and turned down the collar of his raincoat. Then he crossed the busy street and entered the offices of the Japan News Agency. The newsroom was on the third floor, and he found it without difficulty. It was a crowded, bustling place of clattering teletype machines and chattering Japanese voices. Very much like a newsroom anywhere else.

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But then he paused. The desks were set in neat rows, and there was no identification on any of them. Thirty-six men occupied the room, seated at thirty-six desks, and he had no way of identifying the man he sought. He pondered a moment, deciding on the best tactic. His knowledge of Japanese was limited, and he could not simply ask for the man he sought without attracting attention to himself and warning his prey.

There was a pay telephone in the hallway outside the newsroom. He dropped in the necessary coins and dialed the number of the news agency itself. When the operator answered, he spoke the name of the man he sought.

"Shoju Etan."

She made the connection and he heard a phone in the newsroom begin to ring. One among many, but the only one to start ringing at exactly that instant. He let the receiver hang free and stepped back into the newsroom. The man was at the head of the center row of desks, as befitted his position. A dull, middle-aged Japanese speaking now into the silent phone, questioning, waiting.

The man in the black raincoat stepped quickly to the desk and fired one shot from the Llama .32 in his hand. He needed only one shot. The man at the desk slumped over dead, and the phone receiver clattered to the floor.

Then there were screaming and shouting, the turmoil so familiar to his way of life, and death. The man in the raincoat twisted his lip in a sort of smile as he backed through the door and headed for the fire stairs. A copy boy was blocking his path, and the man swung the Llama automatic in a wide arc, catching the youth on the temple. Then he was through the door, running quickly down the stairs to the safety of the street . . .

When Rand stepped off the big jet airliner at Tokyo Airport two days later, the sun was shining brightly. The time change during the flight from London had tired him, and he should have been sleeping, but the sights of the strange and exotic city freshened his mind.

"Your first visit to Tokyo, Mr. Rand?" a voice asked. It belonged to a dark-haired American with fashionable sideburns and badly capped front teeth.

"Yes, it is," Rand replied. "But not my first to the Orient. I visited Hong Kong some years back." He moved into line at the Customs counter. "You must be Lanning."

"That's right," the American said. "My car is outside."

Ten minutes later, seated in the back of an American limousine far too large to pass unnoticed on Tokyo's crowded streets, Samuel Lanning produced his iden-

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tification. Rand inspected the plastic-sealed I.D. card from the Central Intelligence Agency. He'd seen them before, and if they weren't quite as colorfully printed as the Americans' Secret Service identification, they were still impressive.

"You fellows should get your Treasury to print these," Rand commented. "The Secret Service ones look like miniature money."

Sam Lanning blinked and slipped the wallet back in his pocket. "You've been to America? The Secret Service rarely gets to London, I know."

"Oh, yes, New York, Washington, other places. I spent some months there just last year."

Lanning nodded. He spoke a few words in Japanese to the driver and then settled back. "Your department is Concealed Communications, isn't it?" he asked. "Codes and things?"

Rand smiled. "Codes and things. I must say I'm impressed with your car. I didn't realize the CIA payed so well."

The American snorted. "The car belongs to the Embassy, and they don't pay that well. I started at $8000 a year, about what I could have made as a high-school teacher, and a good deal less than I might have earned as an actor."

Rand nodded. The man was interesting, even by the usual standards of the trade. "You were an actor?"

"I did a little Shakespeare after college."

"Hamlet?"

"No, but I did Iago once in a semiprofessional production of *Othello*. That's the longest role Shakespeare ever wrote."

The sedan took an expressway that looped around the Imperial Palace and then left it to wind through the narrow streets of the city. Lanning explained that they were in the Bunkyo-Ku section in the northern part of the city. The car passed the Kodokan Judo Hall and slowed to a stop before a middle-class apartment house. The streets here were filled with young people, and Rand asked about them.

"Tokyo University is only a few blocks away," Lanning said. "Things are normal there now. It's almost time for the summer vacation."

"Who will we be seeing here?" Rand gestured toward the apartment house. "Mrs. Belgrave?"

"Yes. And the other."

Rand frowned at the CIA man. "A replacement for Shoju? I assume someone replaced him after the killing on Monday."

Lanning smiled, as if proud of his little secret. "No one could replace Shoju in this operation, but happily we don't have to. Shoju Etan is alive."

"Alive?" Rand could not conceal his surprise. "But the papers said—"

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"Someone else was sitting at his desk. We decided to play along and throw the assassin off the track temporarily." He opened the door. "Shall we go up now?"

Shoju Etan was a short balding Japanese of indeterminate age, with twinkling eyes that seemed always friendly. Rand had met him in London some years earlier, when he was once honored by a journalism group.

"Shoju! I'm so glad to see you alive!" Rand hurried to shake his hand.

"Ah, the Double-C man!" The slanted eyes took on their familiar twinkle. "I am indeed alive. I could hardly depart this earth without having written that interview we talked of in London."

"The reports in the paper—"

"Ah! We never believe what we read, do we, Mr. Rand? I was writing a series on the Tokyo zoo, and went out for further information. Another man was using my desk, and unfortunately he was mistaken for me."

Rand became aware of the woman who sat in one corner of the pleasant room, her face hidden in shadow. "You must be Mrs. Belgrave."

She stood up and offered her hand. Seeing her face, he was a bit surprised by its obvious youthful beauty. Somehow he'd expected Gordon Belgrave's wife to be close to his age—a woman in her fifties. But Mrs. Belgrave could have been no more than 35, and her flashing red hair contrasted strikingly with the pale skin of her face.

"How do you do, Mr. Rand," she said, speaking with a slight British accent, as of one who has lived most of her life far from her homeland. "I do hope you can help free my husband."

"I'll do what I can, of course," Rand assured her. Then, to Lanning, "Suppose you run over the situation for me. I must admit this attempt to kill Shoju here was more than I'd bargained for."

Lanning cleared his throat, a little like a lecturer. "Sure. Glad to, Rand. As you know, Gordon Belgrave is the American representative of a book publishers' council who was sent to Moscow to negotiate an agreement with the Russians on book royalties. The Reds had been pirating American books for years without paying anything, and lately there's been some reverse pirating by U.S. publishers. Mrs. Belgrave accompanied her husband, and perhaps she should take up the story at this point."

They turned toward the red-haired woman, and in that moment her pale drawn face revealed more of her ordeal than any words she might utter. Finally she pulled herself together and began. "We'd been there about two weeks, and Gordon had met with various

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minor government officals, when one night without any warning we were arrested as we were leaving the hotel for dinner. They said my husband was an American spy, and they—they took us away to jail. I was questioned several times and so was my husband. Finally this man Taz said that I was being released because I was British. He said Gordon had confessed to being an American spy, and would have to stand trial."

Rand interrupted. "Taz is my opposite number in Moscow. His field is codes and ciphers. He wouldn't be involved in a routine espionage case."

"We know about Taz," Lanning said. "That's why you're here, Rand. I understand you've met the man."

"We've met twice, in East Berlin and in Paris, and I think we respect each other's work. It goes no further than that."

"But you're the man to talk to him, to reason with him. He has some coded messages that Gordon Belgrave is supposed to have sent."

"Did Belgrave really confess?"

Lanning motioned to the Japanese reporter. "Shoju can best answer that. He was there."

"I was," Shoju Etan admitted. "I was in Moscow on this series of articles I mentioned, and when I heard of the arrest I hurried to the Kremlin. After some time I managed to see Taz, and he took me with him while he interviewed the prisoner. He said he wanted to avoid the sort of publicity that spy arrests usually received in the Western press. He wanted to show me that Belgrave had not been tortured or brainwashed or otherwise coerced into making a confession."

"And Belgrave did actually confess?"

"He did," the Japanese reporter confirmed. "He said he had sent telegraphic messages to Allied agents in London using something called a SYKO cipher. Taz had the evidence of the messages themselves."

"What information was he supposed to have sent?"

Shoju stirred uneasily. "I did not include this in my published articles on the matter, but the Russians are working on a new form of SUM missile—surface to underwater missile—for use against America's Polaris submarines. I believe Taz suspects that Mrs. Belgrave's husband was spying on this activity."

"I see," Rand commented. "But how can I help?"

Mrs. Belgrave stood up. "My husband is innocent, Mr. Rand. Completely innocent. He's—not well. He had a nervous breakdown about a year ago, and has been under treatment since then. I believe the Russians have done something to his mind."

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"I'm sure the book publishers' council wouldn't have sent him to Moscow if he were seriously ill."

"Oh, it wasn't anything he couldn't control," she insisted. "In fact, he'd been much better since the shock treatments at the hospital. But I can't help feeling that his confession was the result somehow of his mental condition."

Rand turned to Lanning. "What about it, Lanning? Was he working for you?" He knew it was a foolish question, which could only bring a negative reply.

"Absolutely not," the CIA man insisted. "Belgrave was an Army Air Corps Intelligence officer during the Second World War, but he'd been completely separated from any sort of government service ever since. He has absolutely no connection with the CIA, NSA, or any other agency."

"I'm inclined to believe you," Rand said with a smile. Then, to Shoju, "You're returning to Moscow?"

The Japanese nodded. "I said in my last article that I would return this week with Mrs. Belgrave to try and free her husband."

"You think that's why they tried to kill you?"

Shoju shrugged. "I do not know."

"All right," Rand decided. "I'll go with you to Moscow. Since the British government sent me all this distance to help, I hardly think they'd want me to quit now. When is the next plane?"

"There is only one flight each week from Tokyo to Moscow," Shoju informed them. "Every Thursday on Japan Air Lines."

"Tomorrow." Rand considered for a moment. "All right, tomorrow it is."

On the way back to his hotel, alone with Lanning in the back of the limousine, Rand asked the question again. "Is he one of your men, Lanning?"

"No. That's the truth, Rand."

"All right. Next question. Who tried to kill Shoju at his office?"

"We believe it was a Turkish assassin named Sivas. He arrived in Tokyo three days ago and promptly dropped out of sight."

"Who's he working for?"

Lanning spread his hands. "That we don't know. He generally takes assignments from governments rather than from individuals. In recent years he's been quite active in the Middle East and the Balkans."

"Albania?"

"Perhaps."

"Would he work for Moscow?"

"Certainly, if they paid him."

"What does he look like?"

"Medium, dark. His appearance has a way of changing."

"I see," Rand said. He saw, but he didn't like it.

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They gathered at the airport the following day—Rand, Lanning, Mrs. Belgrave, and Shoju Etan. An oddly mixed group, by any standard. Rand looked over his fellow passengers and wondered for the first time what he was doing there. Would he really have any influence with Taz on the Russian's home ground?

The flight was only about half full, with the rest of the passenger list consisting of an assortment of Oriental businessmen and traveling diplomats. There were only two women on board—Mrs. Belgrave and the lady with the coffin.

Rand noticed her at once, but he could hardly credit that to acute powers of observation. She was a striking brunette of perhaps 35—about Mrs. Belgrave's age—and her vaguely Oriental features seemed a perfect blending of the East and West that the flight itself symbolized. Her dress was Oriental, but when she spoke to her traveling companion it was in an English that could only have been learned in India or Hong Kong or some other outpost of the faded Empire.

Her companion was a grumbling man with a sinister face that seemed perpetually twisted into a frown. Lanning took one look at him and whispered to Rand, "Now that fellow could pass for a Turkish assassin any day of the week!"

But it was the coffin more than anything else which attracted attention to the odd pair. A series of adjoining seats had been removed from the rear of the plane's passenger compartment, and six stocky baggage handlers helped carry a full-sized coffin on board. There was a noticeable stir among the passengers, and one man was even about to leave the plane. The pert young stewardess moved up and down the aisle, assuring everyone that the coffin did not really contain a body.

Rand glanced out the window at the morning mists that drifted across the field. Then, as he watched, the big jet engines came to life and the plane began to move. He glanced at his watch. It was 8:20 a.m., Japan time. They were right on schedule.

When they had reached their cruising altitude, Rand unbuckled his seatbelt and moved across the aisle to speak to the handsome brunette with the coffin.

"Excuse me," he said, "but I must admit that my curiosity has the better of me. If there's no body inside, what is in it?"

She smiled up at him. "Sit down. Join us. It's been so long since I've heard a real British accent."

"Thank you."

She introduced the sinister, grumbly man by the window. "This is Dr. Hardan, my associate. I am Yota Twain."

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"My name is Rand. This is my first trip in the Far East, and I'm not accustomed to coffins sharing the passenger quarters on an airline."

She laughed, a musical blending of two cultures. "It is rare, and we had to obtain special permission."

"You still haven't told me what's inside that couldn't be trusted to the baggage compartment."

"And I'm afraid I can't." She made a pretty face. "It's a secret!"

"Classified material," the frowning Dr. Hardan said. "Can't talk."

"I think it's a body after all," Rand said, smiling.

"Perhaps it is," she agreed. "Perhaps I'm a witch, Mr. Rand, and it is the body of something very old, very dangerous. A monster of sorts." She was smiling as she spoke, but somehow her words were not humorous. Rand felt a chill down his spine.

"You're British?" he asked, changing the subject.

"Half, on my father's side. The other side—well, a mixture of things. The dark ways of the Orient. I've never been to England. Is it damp and dreary?"

"Not really. Though there's usually a time every winter when all your friends have colds. I'm used to it, I suppose. I like it."

"What are you doing on a flight to Moscow?"

"Asking questions of ladies with coffins."

"A journalist?"

"Of sorts." He motioned toward the back of Shoju's head. "My friend over there is a real one. I'll bet he could find out what's in your coffin."

She smiled again. "You can see for yourself at Customs. We'll have to open it then."

"The great unveiling."

"Yes." She glanced at her watch, an expensive timepiece with a jeweled face. "This is a very long flight."

"Exactly four thousand six hundred and sixty-three airline miles." Rand liked to impress smiling ladies with his knowledge. "Even nonstop like this it takes over ten hours. It'll be one o'clock this afternoon when we land in Moscow, counting the six hours we gain."

"A walking timetable!"

"A sitting one right now, but I do have to get back to my own seat. I'll talk to you later. Nice to have met you, and Dr. Hardan." The frowning man nodded slightly.

Rand resumed his seat next to Mrs. Belgrave. Lanning and Shoju were in the seats behind them. "Did you have an interesting chat, Mr. Rand?" asked Mrs. Belgrave.

"Didn't learn a thing," he reported. "She says there's a monster in the coffin, and that she's a witch."

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"She said that?"

"More or less. Why?"

Mrs. Belgrave pursed her lips. "I was watching that coffin when we took off. I could have sworn it moved."

"Vibrations."

"No. More than that. And six men to carry it on! It must weigh three hundred pounds!"

"Maybe it's a body after all."

"A live body, Mr. Rand. Do you suppose they're Russian agents, kidnaping someone and taking him back to Moscow against his will?"

"I doubt that."

"I would have doubted that Gordon could be arrested as a spy."

"That's a bit different."

"Do we really know these Russians, Mr. Rand? Do we know what they want, what they're up to?"

"Perhaps they're only afraid," he said. "Like us."

It was a long trip, without even the time-killing relaxation of the in-flight movies provided on trans-Atlantic flights. By the time nine hours had passed, Rand and the others had pulled down the window shades against the noonday sun and were dozing fitfully. Rand was aware of Mrs. Belgrave leaving her seat at one point, making her way toward the rest rooms at the rear of the aircraft.

It was a sound like a cough that awakened him finally, and even then he did not know what had caused it. He glanced around, saw Mrs. Belgrave making her way back down the aisle, saw Shoju and Lanning both dozing in the seats behind him. He got up to stretch his legs and speak to Yota Twain again, but she was not in her seat. Dr. Hardan was alone, his face buried in a Russian-language newspaper.

He found Yota in the rear of the plane, bent over the coffin like some daytime vampire, and once more he felt the chill on his spine. "Checking body temperature?" he asked.

"It would be quite low," she replied, smiling. Then, standing up, she added, "Our journey is almost over."

"None too soon."

"Have you looked out the window? At the snow? It's quite a sight with the sun on it."

"Even in the summer Siberia holds little interest for me."

"This is the Urals. We're passing over them now."

"I'll look," he promised.

"Rand!" He turned and saw that Lanning was motioning to him. Something was wrong—Lanning had lost his coolness.

"What is it?" Rand asked, hurrying up the aisle.

Lanning turned open the jacket of Shoju's suit, showing the widening circle of blood. "Rand—he's been wounded somehow! I think—"

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Rand bent to feel Shoju's pulse, then lifted one eyelid. "He's dead," he said simply. "He's been murdered."

Lanning stared hard at the body in the seat next to him, as if unable to comprehend Rand's words. "But—I was right here all the time! How could he have been murdered?"

Rand avoided the most obvious answer and examined the wound more closely. "It looks like a bullet," he said. "Did you hear a shot?"

"Nothing! I was dozing, but a shot would certainly have awakened me."

"Maybe not," Rand said, remembering now the quiet cough which had awakened him. A silenced pistol, perhaps further muffled by a pillow. With the passengers dozing and the stewardesses busy, no one had noticed. "Have a stewardess report it to the pilot. He should radio ahead and have police waiting at Moscow airport. The gun must still be on the plane."

"What is it?" Mrs. Belgrave wanted to know. She had returned to her seat without realizing anything was amiss.

"There's been some trouble. Shoju is dead."

"*No!*" Her hand flew to her mouth. "What will happen to Gordon now?"

"I don't think it will make his situation worse," Rand told her.

"But why kill Shoju just because he heard Gordon's confession?"

"I don't know. But somebody was certainly intent on getting Shoju out of the way. When the killer failed at the office, he followed Shoju aboard the plane."

Lanning glanced up and down the rows of seats at their fellow passengers. "The Turkish assassin—Sivas?"

"Maybe," Rand agreed. "Mrs. Belgrave, did you notice anyone else in the aisle when you went to the rest room?"

"Only that woman, back there with her coffin."

Some of the other passengers were beginning to group around them now, and a stewardess had arrived. Dr. Hardan came across the aisle to look, and Rand asked him, "Are you a medical doctor?"

"I—no. What has happened?"

"A man's been killed." He saw Yota hurrying up to join them, and he moved down the aisle past her. While they were busy looking at the body he'd have a few minutes alone with the mysterious coffin.

Rand dropped to his knees beside the polished wooden box and pressed his ear against it. There might have been a sound from inside, but he couldn't be sure. He took a deep breath and began to unscrew the bolts that held the lid in place.

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"No! *Keep away from there!*" Yota Twain flew down the aisle at him, her little fists clenched. "Don't open that!"

"I'm sorry," Rand said, trying to fight her off. "I have to open it. A man's been murdered. The weapon may have been hidden in here."

"There's no weapon! Don't open it!"

"Lanning! Keep her off me, will you?"

The CIA man had appeared behind Yota, and now he grabbed her arms, pinning them to her side. "Calm down, Miss."

"You don't understand! If you lift that lid—"

Rand twirled the last bolt free and began to raise the lid, slowly, mindful of a bomb or booby trap.

But the thing that faced him as he lifted the lid was much older than a bomb, and perhaps more dangerous. Their eyes met for just an instant, and then the ancient scaly jaws began to open slowly.

The thing in the coffin was a crocodile.

"I wish you'd listened to me," Yota told him when the lid had been screwed down again. "It upsets him to have it opened like that."

"It upset me a bit too," Rand agreed. "Suppose you explain."

"It's not at all that unusual, Mr. Rand. Crocodiles are sometimes shipped between zoos in coffins, simply because it's such a perfect container for them. This particular specimen is a Philippine crocodile, almost fully grown. We're transferring him from the Tokyo zoo to the Moscow zoo, for mating with a female they have there."

"You couldn't tell us this before, Miss Twain?"

She smiled. "My real name is Dr. Yota Nobea, professor of zoology at Tokyo University. I have close ties with the zoo. And no, we couldn't tell you this, Mr. Rand. Passengers would have been just as disturbed flying with a live crocodile as with a dead body, I'm afraid."

Rand glanced back at Shoju's seat. "Now they have both, I'm afraid. I suppose Dr. Hardan is a zoologist too."

"That's correct. He's worked closely with me on the crocodile-mating project."

"Why would anyone want to mate crocodiles?"

She shrugged. "It is an occupation much preferred to the killing of people, Mr. Rand."

Lanning came up from the front of the plane, carrying a Llama automatic wrapped in a handkerchief. "We found the murder weapon, Rand. It was stuffed into an empty seat. Anyone could have put it there during the excitement just now. Here's the silencer, too."

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"Could this be the gun that killed the man in Shoju's office?"

"Same caliber. Yes, it could be."

"Then Sivas is on this plane?"

"Sivas or someone else." Lanning tried to grin. "I don't go much for mysterious Turkish assassins myself. Sometimes life is a lot simpler."

Rand stepped away so that Yota could not hear his answer. "Someone doesn't want Belgrave freed. Could it be his wife?"

"I'll buy anything at this point, Rand, if you can come up with a motive and evidence."

The plane was beginning its descent. A voice on the intercom instructed the passengers to fasten their seatbelts. In a few moments they would be on the ground at Moscow airport.

Rand had been waiting for the better part of two hours in the high-ceilinged Kremlin office before Taz made his appearance. He was as Rand remembered him from Paris—middle-aged, with a thin face, pointed jaw, and deep blue eyes. His graying hair swept back from his forehead, and his thin fingers played nervously with the metal buttons of his jacket.

"Ah, my friend Rand!" He extended his hand in greeting, speaking the same accented English that Rand remembered from their previous meetings. "I am so sorry to keep you waiting like this, but your flight from Tokyo has complicated our lives. The murder of a news reporter is not to be taken lightly."

"I'm glad to hear that." Rand wished he had a cigarette.

"But the killing is out of my hands. You come to discuss the arrest of the spy Belgrave, no?"

"No. Belgrave's no spy and you know it, Taz."

"I do *not* know it, my friend. He has confessed, and we have the evidence."

"I'd like to see that evidence."

Taz smiled slightly and untied a folder he'd been carrying. "I like to anticipate you. I especially like it when we are deciphering your messages."

Rand frowned. This was, in some ways, a new Taz—a man supremely confident. "We're pretty good at anticipating too," he countered lamely. "Now, let's see this evidence."

Taz spread the telegraph forms on the desk between them. There were six in all, made up of familiar five-character cipher groups. Rand scanned one at random: 3H9J4 WBRD1 SQ25F MILT7 6G8RP. "You've deciphered it?" he asked Taz.

"In essence. After he confessed, Belgrave read the rest for us. A SYKO cipher, of course. I suspected as much when I saw the mixture of numerals and letters."

"Were these actually sent?"

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"Of course not!" Taz chuckled at the very thought of it. "Russian telegraph offices could hardly be expected to transmit enciphered messages."

"Exactly!" Rand pointed out. "So what did Belgrave hope to gain by trying to send them? If he'd discovered any secrets it would have been much safer to carry them back to America inside his head."

"The fact remains that he confessed. And without torture."

"The only witness to that is dead now."

"The Japanese?" Taz dismissed him with a wave of the hand. "*I* was a witness to it. Do you not accept my word?"

Rand looked into the deep blue eyes. "I do," he said at last.

"Then what else is there to discuss? The man was caught trying to send enciphered messages, and he confessed to being an American spy."

"Spying on what? On your new SUM missile?"

"The particular nature of his espionage is not important."

"I think it's damned important," Rand barked, leaning forward until his face was only inches from Taz's. "There's nothing in these messages about the SUM and you know it!"

"Do I?"

"Because if there was you wouldn't be so free in showing them to me. I could have them memorized already, for all you know. It's not too difficult a feat."

"All right." Taz leaned back, breaking the contact of their eyes. "The messages did not mention SUM. They seemed to be about aircraft reconnaissance. They did not, admittedly, make a great deal of sense."

"I wouldn't think so."

Taz frowned at him now. "Why not?"

"Because the SYKO cipher was a widely used Allied air-ground system during World War II. It hasn't been used since then. Gordon Belgrave was an Air Corps Intelligence officer during the war. He was confessing to acts of espionage committed twenty-five years ago."

Taz turned from the desk and walked over to the high broad window that reached almost to the ceiling. He stood for a moment gazing out at the lights of the Moscow evening; then at last he turned to face Rand.

"You can prove what you say?"

"Belgrave had a nervous breakdown last year. He received shock treatments. Your medical men will tell you that such shock treatments sometimes cause age regression. Belgrave came here to meet with Russian publishers, but suddenly imagined himself in the world of twenty-five years ago. He tried to send messages in the old SYKO cipher, and when you

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arrested him he confessed to espionage."

"It's possible," Taz admitted somewhat reluctantly. "It would explain the oddness of the messages."

"It's more than possible—it happened. I want the man released at once, Taz."

"That is beyond my authority."

"Like hell it is! What do you hope to gain by holding him?"

Taz motioned him to the window. "Forget about the American for a moment and look down on all this. We are in one of Moscow's tallest buildings—not tall by American standards, but it compares favorably with London, no?"

"Get to the point, Taz. The American is innocent. What do you want in exchange for him?"

The blue eyes blinked. "What do I want? Why, I want you, my friend. And it appears that I have you."

"What new game is this?" Rand felt his blood run cold. Had he been outwitted somehow?

"I could press that button on the desk and have you arrested for murder, Mr. Rand."

"Murder!"

"The murder of one Shoju Etan on a Japanese airliner over Russian territory."

"You're crazy, my friend."

"I could produce three witnesses who would swear they saw you shoot him."

"You had Shoju killed just to frame me for his murder?"

"Hardly. But it *is* convienient, is it not? I could keep you here, remove you forever from the Department of Concealed Communications."

"If that's what you want you could have me killed back in London any day of the week. I'm really quite vulnerable, as I told you once before."

Taz shook his head. "I do not want you dead, my friend. I want only to make you an offer."

"In return for my freedom?"

"In return for the freedom of Gordon Belgrave."

"He means nothing to me."

Taz shrugged. "Very well, then. Who else must I seize? The American CIA man—Lanning?"

"Leave him out of it." Rand realized that his palms were sweating. He'd come here as the cat and now suddenly he felt like the mouse. "What is your offer?"

Taz smiled, motioning toward the walls with their proletarian adornment. "I can assure you there are no listening devices in this room."

"I accept your assurance."

"Very well. Let us get to business. My offer is simply this—that we, you and I, join forces for our own betterment. That we, shall I say, exchange certain key pieces of information regarding our codes and ciphers."

Rand leaned forward, not cer-

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tain that he'd heard correctly. "You can't be serious!"

"I'm deadly serious, my friend. Neither of us grows younger. The espionage business is a dying one, replaced by satellites in the sky and old men around a conference table. Would it not be to our advantage to work together, to try and gather a—what is it called?—yes, a nest egg for the days of our enforced retirement. What I am suggesting, after all, is no more than Major Batjuschin suggested to Captain Redl in 1902."

This brought a smile from Rand. "You mean Captain Redl, the archtraitor?"

"Yes or no, my friend?"

"I suppose, Taz, that what you're suggesting is the only sensible course for practical men to follow. And I suppose I'm both foolish and old-fashioned in turning you down."

"What is it—patriotism?"

"Nothing so nebulous as that. I suppose, quite simply, it's just that I don't quite trust you, my friend."

The Russian's face froze. "Very well. Then Gordon Belgrave remains with us."

Rand held up a hand. "Not so fast. Now it's my turn to propose a deal. Do I have your word that the Russians are n o t responsible for Shoju Etan's murder?"

"You have it."

"What about a man named Sivas?"

"A hired killer, employed by the Albanians, and sometimes by their friends the Chinese."

"I suspected as much."

"Is Sivas here, in Moscow?" asked Taz curiously.

"If you'll release Belgrave, I'll deliver Sivas—and more besides."

"More?"

"Now it's your turn to trust me."

Taz nodded slowly. "Show me Sivas. Where is he?"

"Let's look for him together. At the Moscow zoo."

Dr. Yota Nobea glanced up as they entered, neglecting for a moment the languid crocodile in its shallow pool of water. "The zoo is closed till morning," she said automatically. "It's almost eleven o'clock."

"You've forgotten me already?" Rand asked. "After only ten hours?"

"Mr. Rand! What brings you to the zoo at night? And who is that with you?"

"My name is Taz," the Russian said softly.

"You really must excuse me. I'm getting my crocodile settled in his new quarters."

"We don't want the crocodile," Rand said. "We want the coffin he came in."

"The coffin! It's out on the truck. But why do you want it?"

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"Because, Dr. Nobea, six big men had to struggle to get that coffin on board. A full-grown Philippine crocodile weighs less than an average person, and you said this one wasn't yet full-grown. I want what's hidden in the bottom of that coffin."

"There's nothing," she said, but her eyes darted with fright.

"No Customs man would search further after you showed him the crocodile, would he? And no Customs man would question the total weight of the coffin, at least not when it arrived in the care of Professor Nobea of Tokyo University. Which brings us to the question: what happened to the real Professor Nobea?"

Yota's mouth twisted. "I am Nobea."

Rand shook his head. "Shoju Etan was doing a series of articles on the Tokyo zoo, which included research in Moscow. He must have known about the cocodile-mating project. He must have met the real Nobea. That was why Shoju Etan had to die, wasn't it? Not because of Gordon Belgrave's confession, but because of Shoju's zoo articles. Not because the newspaperman might recognize you on the plane, but because he *wouldn't* recognize you! When that coffin was opened at Customs and you identified yourself as Dr. Nobea, Shoju would have been there to call you a liar."

"The first attempt on Shoju was made at his office," Taz objected. "How would they know that soon whether he would be on the same flight?"

"Shoju wrote in his Belgrave story that he'd be returning to Moscow this week, and there's only one flight from Tokyo to Moscow each week. Yota knew he'd be on that plane, and so he had to die. When they failed to kill him earlier, they had to do it before the plane landed. I had a tip when Yota admitted using a false name early in the flight. There was no reason for it—except to keep her assumed identity a secret from Shoju till he was dead."

There was a sound behind them, and Rand saw Dr. Hardan in the doorway. He was wearing a black raincoat and he held a Llama automatic in his hand. A spare in his baggage, of course. All experienced assassins carry two.

Yota screamed something in Chinese and leaped to the side of the crocodile pond. Taz turned, his reactions just a bit too slow, and saw the assassin's gun trained on him. Rand had only a second to consider the alternatives. Then he fired through the pocket of his jacket and caught Hardan in the chest.

"You were armed," Taz muttered, recovering himself enough to get a firm grip on the woman.

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"No one searched me," Rand replied with a smile. "I always visit Russians with a gun in my pocket." He walked over and nudged the body on the concrete floor. "This is Dr. Hardan, or if you prefer, Sivas, late Turkish assassin. Funny, Lanning said he even looked like one. The CIA can't be all bad."

"What is in the bottom of the coffin?" Taz asked.

"Something Chinese agents were anxious to smuggle into Moscow. You take it from there."

"I will, my friend," Taz said.

The following morning a Russian military transport was waiting at Moscow airport. Rand and Taz watched while Mrs. Belgrave led her husband to the plane, and then Rand said, "Thanks for the transportation. It saves us a wait."

"Thank *you*, Mr. Rand." The Russian seemed in good spirits.

"The coffin?"

"It's not my department, but I understand it's very critical. Pieces of metal, and much wiring. The more melodramatic of our people suspect they may be components of a small Chinese atomic bomb."

Rand whistled. "You'd better watch out for the rest of it."

"We will." Taz paused. "And Rand, if you ever decide to accept my offer—"

"Don't count on it. In this business we all end up poor. There's no beating the system, Taz." He remembered Lanning's complaint about his low pay, and saw the CIA man walking toward them. "I'd better go now."

The Russian nodded and waved as they parted. Then Rand fell into step with Lanning and they walked to the waiting jet. "You did a good job, Rand," the American observed. "We just heard from Tokyo that they've located the real Dr. Nobea. She was drugged but unharmed."

"It was a good job," Rand agreed. "I helped Taz and I freed Belgrave. Sorry you couldn't get the plan for the SUM missile while we were at it."

Lanning started up the steps of the plane, then turned back toward Rand with a little smile. "What makes you think we didn't get it?" he whispered.

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Winner of a* SECOND PRIZE *in

the* CWA *contest

CELIA FREMLIN

Lorna Webster is a 16-year-old. We do not know if Lorna represents the typical teen-age schoolgirl, in the year of our Lord 1970; we suspect, however, that she is more typical than atypical, both in England and in the United States. But either way you owe it to yourself to find out how Lorna feels about her Mummy, her Daddy, her home—about, in a word, "life" . . . A memorable short story by Celia Fremlin revealing her very special "touch," at which she has few peers among contemporary writers. No, you won't forget this story soon, not even if you try to heed its title . . .

DON'T BE FRIGHTENED

by CELIA FREMLIN

NOW THAT SHE HAD IT TO HERself, Lorna Webster felt she could almost enjoy hating her home so much. She flung her beret onto the sofa, dumped her school bag down in the middle of the floor, and watched with satisfaction as the books and papers spilled out over her mother's spotless, well-vacuumed carpet. It was nice to be able to mess it up like that, without risk of reprimand.

She gazed round the neat, firelit room with contempt. Hideous ornaments—houseplants, b r i c - a - brac of all kinds; and on either side of the fireplace those two neat, well-upholstered armchairs were drawn up, for all the world as if a happily married couple habitually sat in them; a contented couple, smiling at each other across the hearth; not a couple like Lorna's parents, a l w a y s wrangling, bickering, squabbling, the long evenings filled with temper or with tears.

With slatternly, spreadeagled violence Lorna flung herself into the nearer of the two chairs,

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sending it skidding and scratching under her weight across the polished wooden floor around the carpet.

That was better! Lorna spread out the length of her legs untidily, in the luxurious abandonment of solitude—real, reliable, long-term solitude, a whole glorious evening of it, and a whole night to follow!

Such a fuss there had been about this simple business of leaving her alone in the house for one night! Just as if she had been a baby, instead of a young woman of nearly sixteen!

"Be sure you bolt all the doors," her mother had said, not once but ten times. "Be sure you put the guard in front of the fire before you go to bed. Be sure you turn off the oven. Be sure you don't answer the door to anyone you don't know. And remember you can always go over to the Holdens if you feel the least bit nervous."

Go over to the Holdens, indeed! Lorna would have died—yes, she would willingly have lain right here on the carpet with her throat cut—before she would run for help to that dreary Holden woman, who was both boring and sly, with her perpetual chatter-chatter over the wall to Mummy about the problems of teenage daughters. Ugh!

Ah, but this was the life! Lorna slid yet deeper and more luxuriously into the cushioned depths of the chair. Tea when she liked; supper when she liked; homework when she liked; music when she liked. Lorna's eyes turned with lazy anticipation toward the pile of pop records stacked under the record player. Ah, the fuss there usually was over those records, with Mummy twittering in and out, trying to stop Daddy being annoyed by them. "Can't you turn it down a little lower, dear? Can't you play them in the afternoons when Daddy's not here? You know how it annoys him."

What Mummy didn't realize was that actually it was quite fun annoying Daddy—a real roaring bellowing row instead of all these anxious twitterings! And afterward Daddy would go on yelling at Mummy for hours, long after the records were finished and done with. And then next day Mummy would scuttle about with red eyes, polishing things, as if a tidy polished house was some sort of protection against quarreling!

Honestly, *adults!* That's why I hate the smell of polish, thought Lorna, deliberately jolting the chair on its rusty casters back and forth across the polished floor, making deep dents and scratches in the wood. It's misery-polish that Mummy put on everything; it's dishonesty-polish, trying to make this look like a happy home when it isn't!

And it's all because Mummy's

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too cowardly, too much of a doormat, to stand up to Daddy's tempers—so she tidies the house instead. I bet she's tidied the kitchen even better than usual today, just because she's nervous about leaving me alone! She thinks tidiness is a substitute for *everything!*

Stirred by a flicker of resentful curiosity, and also by a mounting interest in the thought of tea, Lorna dragged herself from her luxurious position, and went to the kitchen to investigate.

Yes, it was immaculate. Every surface scrubbed and shining; a delicious little dish of cooked chicken salad all ready for Lorna's supper; and for her tea—just look!—a big expensive, once-in-a-lifetime meringue, bursting with cream! A treat! Another of Mummy's pathetic attempts to provide Lorna with at least the shell of a happy home!

Irritation fought in Lorna with eager appetite. Does she think I'm a baby, or something, who needs to be consoled for its Mummy being away? I *love* Mummy being away! I love it, I love it!—and with each "love" her teeth sank deeper into the rare luscious thing; the cream spurted with bounteous prodigality across her cheeks, and she didn't even have to wipe them, because she was alone. Alone, alone, alone—the nearest thing to Paradise! . . .

Outside, the spring evening was fading. The sob and thrum of Lorna's favorite records mingled first with a pink sunset light in the pale room; then with a pearly silvery grayness against which the firelight glowed ever more orange and alive; and at last, curtains drawn, lamps switched on, coals piled recklessly into a roaring blaze, it was night; and still the records played on, over and over again. It was too lovely a time, this time of firelight and perfect solitude, to waste on anything less beautiful than the music which her parents hated so . . .

It was nearly nine o'clock when the telephone began to ring. It began just as Lorna had settled herself cosily by the fire with her tray of chicken salad, rolls, and a huge mug of boiling hot, sweet black coffee, whose deliciousness was enhanced by the fact that Mummy would have said, "Don't have it black, dear, not at this time of night; it'll keep you awake."

Damn! she thought, setting down the mug in the middle of the first glorious sip. Damn! and then: Why don't I ignore it? I bet it'll just be Mummy, fussing about something. Yes, driving along those monotonous miles of highway, she'll have been thinking up some new things to worry about. Have I latched the kitchen window? Will I be sure and shut the spare-room window if it rains?

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Fuss, fuss, fuss, an expensive long-distance fuss from a roadside phone booth.

I *won't* answer, why should I? I'll just let it ring; serve her right, teach her a lesson, show her I'm not a baby. Defiantly Laura raised the mug to her lips once more, and calmly, leisurely, resumed her sipping.

But how the telephone kept on! It was irritating, it was spoiling this solitary, delightful meal which she had planned to savor to the full. She put down her knife and fork restlessly. Weren't they *ever* going to stop ringing? How long *do* people go on ringing before they finally give up? And just then, at last, with a despairing little hiccup, the telephone became quiet.

Silence swung back into the room, flooding Lorna with relief. She picked up her knife and fork once more and prepared to recapture her interrupted bliss. Having a meal alone by the fire like this! Alone! The joy of it! No table manners. No conversation. Just peace, delicious peace.

But somehow it had all been spoiled. The slow, savory mouthfuls tasted of almost nothing now; the new favorite magazine propped against the coffee pot could not hold her attention; and she was conscious of an odd tenseness, a waiting, listening unease in every nerve.

She finished the meal without enjoyment, and as she carried the tray out to the kitchen the telephone began again.

The shock was somehow extraordinary. Almost dropping the tray onto the kitchen table, Lorna turned and ran headlong back into the sitting room, slamming the door behind her as if that would somehow protect her from the imperious, nagging summons. All her sense of guilt and unease at not having answered before seemed to make it doubly impossible to answer now; and the longer she let it ring, the more impossible it became.

Why should anybody ring so long and so persistently? If it was Mummy, then surely she would have assumed by now that Lorna had gone over to the Holdens? Who else could it be who would ring and ring and ring like this? Surely no one goes on ringing a number *forever?* Oh, please God, make it stop!

And at last, of course, it did stop; and again the silence filled her ears in a great flood, but this time there was no relief in it. She felt herself so tense, so tightly listening, that it was almost as if she knew, deep in her knotted stomach, just what was going to happen next.

It was a light, a very light footstep on the path out front that next caught her hearing; lightly up the steps, and then a fumbling at the front door. Not

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a knock, not a ring—just a fumbling, as if someone were trying to unlock the door, someone too weak, or too blind, to turn the key.

"Be sure you bolt all the doors." In her head Lorna seemed to hear those boring, familiar instructions not for the fifteenth time, but for the first. "Be sure you latch the kitchen window. Don't answer the door to anyone you don't know."

Lorna tiptoed out into the hall, and for few moments she fancied that she must have imagined the sounds, for all was quiet. No shadowy silhouette could be seen looming against the frosted panels of the door, palely glittering in the light of the street lamp. But even as she stood there, the flap of the letter box began to stir, slowly. Lorna was looking into an eye.

A single eye, of course, as it would be if anyone were peering through a letter box; and yet, irrationally, it was this singleness that shocked Lorna most, carrying her back in an instant, beyond the civilized centuries, right back to the Cyclops, to the mad mythical beginnings of mankind. Lorna began to scream.

"Don't be frightened," came a voice from outside—a *y o u n g* voice, Lorna registered with gasping thankfulness and surprise. Why, it was a *girl's* voice! A girl no older than herself by the sound of it! "Don't be frightened, Lorna—but do please let me in."

Reassured completely by hearing her own name, Lorna flung the door open.

"Oh, you *did* give me a fright—" she was beginning, but then stopped, puzzled. For though the girl standing there looked vaguely familiar, and was roughly her own age, Lorna did not know her. She had taken for granted, when she heard herself addressed by name, that she would be bound to recognize the speaker.

"Hello! I—that is, I'm awfully sorry, I'm sure I ought to know you—?" Lorna began uncertainly.

"It's all right; I didn't think you would recognize me at once," answered the girl, stepping confidently into the hall and looking round her. "I hope you don't mind my coming out of the blue like this; but I used to live here, you see."

She was a forceful-looking girl, Lorna could see now, standing there under the hall light, with strong black hair springing from a high, very white forehead; and her eyes were dark, and snapping-bright, as if, thought Lorna, she had a quick temper and a quick wit, and very much a will of her own.

"Oh, I see." Lorna tried to collect her wits. This must be the daughter of the family that had lived here before Lorna's family had moved in, seven or eight years

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ago. "Oh, I see—fancy you remembering my name! Do come in—I expect you'd like to look at everything, see how it's changed since you were here."

Already she felt that she was going to like this girl, who was looking round with such bright interest, and seemed so friendly. "I'll show you my room first, shall I? I wonder if it was the same one you had? It's the little back one that looks out on the garden."

By the time they had explored the house, Lorna felt as if she and this other girl had known each other for years. They seemed to have so much the same tastes, the same loves and hates; and as they sat in front of the fire afterward, with a newly made pot of coffee between them, Lorna found herself confiding all her troubles to her new friend: Daddy's tempers, Mummy's submission and anxious, fussy housekeeping.

"I wouldn't mind," she explained, "if Mummy was *really* a house-proud sort of person—if she really got any pleasure out of making the house look nice. But she doesn't. She does it in a desperate sort of way. She clutters everything up with flowers and hideous ornaments—"

"—as if it was a substitute for making you and your father happy, you mean?" put in the other girl quickly. "You mean, since she can't give you a happy home, she's determined to give you a neat clean one, full of *things*."

"That's it, that's it exactly!" cried Lorna. "How well you understand! But why such *ugly* things?" Her eyes swept the mantelpiece and the crowded corner cupboard. "It's as if she collected ugly things on purpose."

"I don't think so," said the other girl, glancing rapidly round the room. "They're not actually ugly, you know—not each of them taken singly. It's just that nobody loves them—your mother and father never chose any of them together, in some little curio shop, on some holiday when they were enjoying themselves. I expect your mother bought them pretending it was like that when it wasn't."

"Why, yes, I expect she did. That would be exactly like her!" cried Lorna, enchanted. Never had she found anyone before who could understand her as this girl did. "That's why I hate them so!"

"So let's smash them," said the other girl, in the same quiet, thoughtful tones. "Let's bash them to pieces on the marble fireplace there. Think how they'd crash and shatter!" There was a strange gleam in her dark eyes, and Lorna stared at her, for the first time uneasy. But she was joking—of course she was, she must be.

"Wouldn't I just love to!" Lorna gave a little laugh appropriate to such nonsense. "Have some more coffee?"

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"No, I mean it. Let's! You hate them—you are right to hate them. Hateful things should be s-s-s-*smashed!*" And snatching a china shepherdess from the mantelpiece, the girl flung it with all her strength into the grate.

The splintering, s h o c k i n g, unimaginable crash shocked Lorna speechless. "Stop!" she tried to cry out as a teapot and two vases burst like spray across the hearthrug; and then, even as she finally gasped out her protests, something extraordinary began to seep into her soul. Shock, yes; but what was this joy, this exultation, this release of long pent-up anger, as crash followed crash and splinters of china bounded across the room like hail?

"Smash them, smash them!" the girl was shouting, her dark face alight with a strange joy. "Rip up the cushions! Pull down the curtains—they were sewn i n misery, not in love, every stitch was stitched in misery!" With a great rending sigh the curtains came down and huddled on the floor; and by now both girls were upon them, ripping, tearing. A madness not her own was in Lorna now, and she too was tearing, smashing, hurling, in an ecstasy of shared destruction such as she had never dreamed possible.

Dreamed? *Was* she dreaming? Was that the telephone waking her, ringing, ringing, r i n g i n g across the devastated room? This time Lorna ran instantly to answer and snatched it from its hook.

Yes, yes, this was the home of Mrs. Mary Webster. "Yes, I'm her daughter. No, I'm afraid my father is not in. You rang several times before? Oh. Yes. What is it? What is it?"

An accident. "My dear, I'm very, very sorry to have to tell you . . . an accident . . . your mother. Yes, your mother. A truck out of a side road . . . it must have been instantaneous . . . " And a lot more—kindly, helpful, sympathetic. Kind people on their way to Lorna right now. Lorna couldn't really take it in.

She was not surprised, when she went slowly back to the sitting room, to find that her new friend was gone. She had known that she would be gone, for she knew now who it must have been. For who else could have hated the room as Lorna hated it? Who else would have come back, at the last, to destroy it?

And, after all, the destruction was not so very great; for a ghost, even using all its strength, is not as strong as a living person. A few things were broken, the curtains crumpled and awry; and as Lorna sank down among the mussed cushions she was crying; crying with happiness because she and her mother—her real mother, the one hidden beneath the doormat exterior all these years—had understood each other at last.

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A clever racetrack story—always an interesting plot ploy even if you're not a patron of the ponies and don't know a bangtail from a nightingale . . .

A KILLING ON CHALK

by MARK O'DAY

MY FIRST MISTAKE WAS FEELing sorry for the guy. It lowered my defenses and left me vulnerable. But he was so helpless, so disorganized and at loose ends, that cunning on his part was not consistent with the circumstances of our meeting.

I was on vacation the day that Wilcox dropped from emphysema. With a title fight scheduled that night, the sports department was hurting for sufficient writers to give it proper coverage. In desperation they pulled a cub reporter from the obits department and sent him to assist Brent and Sullivan. My second day back Brent briefed me by the water cooler.

"Jimbo, you've got to see this guy to believe him. I mean, where did they trap him?"

"Come on, he can't be that bad."

Brent whispered, "Don't look now."

The new man was catapulting through the sports department with an afterdraft that lifted copy sheets from desks. Resplendent in a bright blue sports coat, yellow shirt, red string tie, green socks, and mauve shoes, he reminded me of a routed peacock. He braked at the water cooler, greeted Brent effusively, then directed his staccato delivery to me.

"Jim Norton, that equine expert, that turf pundit, that railbird raconteur." His strong small hand pincered mine, realigning the knuckles. "I'm Gino, your Number One fan, friend, and faithful servant." Mercifully he ran out of breath.

It was a short reprieve. With words as flamboyant as his wardrobe Gino stated his goal: to assist in the researching, writing, and editing of copy for the sports pages, working toward that happy day when he would have a byline of his own. In the weeks that followed, his intention was fortified by action. I began to feel pampered, what with steaming coffee refills within reach only

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moments after the need was expressed, and all dreary researching in the morgue taken off my hands. I had only to unstopper my inkwell and a rainbow-hued djinn swirled up, restive to please.

Despite his bombast and garish garb, Gino was knowledgeable in all sports except one—my specialty, thoroughbred racing. I suppose I should have realized this was why he had welded himself to me, become my friend, helper, and, yes, student. When Sullivan returned to the department one day, waving and kissing the $100 he had won from the bookie on a 50-to-1 shot, Gino went overboard on parimutuel wagering. He became insatiable in his thirst for information on how to handicap the horses.

He didn't have to search far. Everyone was eager to impart his sure-fire system for picking winners. Their accounts were peppered with racetrack terminology that left poor Gino bewildered: class drop, overnight claimer, maiden allowance. But he was a quick learner and soon was joining Sullivan and Brent on a lunch-hour safari to the neighborhood bookie to back some horses. Brent expressed amazement at Gino's betting habits.

"Jim, I figured him for a plunger, considering his clothes and all, but he plays nothing but red-hot favorites. So he wins a few, sure, but they don't pay much, and they don't come close to offsetting his losses. I tried to reason with the guy, but it's hopeless. Why don't you try?"

"Because," I said, "I'm not his keeper. He's over twenty-one and if he's determined to bet that way there's nothing I can say to dissuade him."

This wasn't quite true. From the outset Gino had looked on me as the last word in explaining the mechanics of parimutuel betting. I can still remember the day he asked me what people meant when they referred to a horse as "chalk."

"It means, Gino, the favorite in the race, the best horse going." I can see now I should have qualified that statement, explaining that it was merely the horse with the best recent form, but that all past history flew out the window once the starting gate slammed open.

"Then why," he wanted to know, "do people bet on the other horses in the race if one of them is definitely the best?"

I began to explain about hunch players, system players, and so forth, but he wasn't listening.

"Jim, I'm going to bet nothing but chalk. They're the best horses, so why should I play anything else?"

I was going to show him that this would be fatal from a financial point of view but decided

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that a few burnings at the bookie's would teach him soon enough. From what Brent reported, Gino was proving a stubborn case.

What is worse, Gino was becoming an object of derision both in the office and at the bookie's. His refusal to bet on anything but torrid favorites earned him the nickname of Gutless Gino. He shrugged it off with aplomb and announced loudly that his critics would sing a different tune one day when he would make "a killing on chalk." This remark evoked gales of laughter and added to his reputation.

One Saturday afternoon Brent took Gino to a live performance of the races at Santa Anita. Gino was like a child at Christmas, dazzled by the surging lines at the windows and the full-throated roar of the crowd as the horses pounded around the far turn and into the stretch. Just before the feature race went off, Gino dashed to the $10 window to bet the odds-on favorite. He was so surprised to see that his wager had not affected the odds on the horse that Brent could not even laugh.

Instead, Brent sympathetically pointed out that the horse had over $87,000 bet on him to win; Gino's $10 was like a drop in the ocean; it could not cause the mildest ripple on the tote board. Gino nodded sagely and when his horse came galloping in a winner Brent misunderstood the smile that wreathed his features.

Of course, no one enjoyed Gino's obsession with chalk more than the bookie, a thin dyspeptic man named Lucas who operated in the rear room of Papa's Pool Hall. Gino's pattern of betting established him as a mark, a gambler who would, through the inflexible law of percentages, lose his bundle gradually—but surely. It irritated me to see the way Lucas would brighten when Gino entered the room to make a play. For Lucas was safe, no matter how much Gino might wager. When Gino's horse won, his return was miniscule; when his horse lost, the bookie recouped his losses tenfold.

Lucas could not be so relaxed in his dealings with the rest of us. Brent was a notorious plunger; once, after winning $600 on a longshot, he bet half of it immediately on another horse that was 50-to-1. Lucas was on the phone quickly, spreading most of that wager around town with other bookies willing to handle a part.

One day Gino asked Lucas if he'd take a bet on a horse running at Tropical Park in Florida.

"What are you doing, Gino, branching out?"

Gino shrugged. "Well, no, but this one looks real good at three to five and I was hoping to get a little down."

"Sure, sure." Lucas was all affability as he checked the morning

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paper to see that the horse was, indeed, the strongest favorite of the day. "How much, Gino?" Lucas asked.

Gino dropped a roll of bills on the table with studied nonchalance. "One hundred cool ones."

Lucas whistled appreciatively. "Quite a plunge for you, Gino. Could this be the killing you've been talking about?" The others in the room snickered. Lucas wrote hastily. "Okay, here's your slip. G'luck."

Gino's horse won and he made a profit of $60. As he paid out, Lucas said, in mock wonder, "Looks like you're on a winning streak, kid. Anything else you want today?"

Gino hesitated. "No, but there's a real good thing going tomorrow in the first race at Hempstead Downs. I'd like to go pretty heavy on him. How about it?"

Lucas snorted. "That dirt track upstate? I'm surprised you're even following them up there. Paper says their handle is so small they may have to close. People really want to see good horses run, they'll make it down here to Santa Anita."

"That doesn't answer my question." Gino was at the door, ready to leave. "Will you take the bet or not?"

Lucas smiled thinly. "For you, Gino, sure. I mean, a bet is a bet, right?"

But Gino didn't place the bet—not directly, that is. For he was now ready to make his killing on chalk, and I was to be the unwitting accomplice in his coup.

The next day he stopped at my desk, a bulging white envelope in his hand.

"Jimbo, the old man is sending me upstate on an assignment. Lucas won't set up shop until after I've gone, so would you place a bet for me?"

It seemed an innocent request and I agreed. He placed the envelope on my desk, near my hand. "The whole bundle on Sir Keno in the first at Hempstead Downs."

I couldn't help but moan. My own computations the night before had shown that Sir Keno was the surest winner of the day at Hempstead Downs. He had won his last race by seven lengths and today was facing a field inferior to the one he had previously trounced. Weight, post position, jockey—everything was in his favor and pointed to the race as being a laugher.

"One more thing," Gino said. "If anyone should ask—especially Lucas—just tell them I have to work and couldn't get away. All right?"

I should have been suspicious but was caught off guard and muttered assent.

I deferred opening the envelope until I confronted the bookie. That way we could verify each

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other's count of the contents. The bills were twenties, tens, and fives, tightly girdled by a fat elastic band. And they totaled $1000.

Lucas and I exchanged startled looks. He shuffled the pile of bills together like a deck of cards.

"Mr. Newspaperman, your friend is some kind of a nut."

I had to agree. Gino's salary was geared to $10 wagers at most. This bet represented a plunge that could be paid for only at the sacrifice of long-time savings or, even worse, a loan.

"Here." Lucas' hand was prodding me out of my thoughts, offering me his slip. I stared dumbly at Gino's receipt.

"You're covering it all, Lucas? Aren't you going to lay some of it off with other books?"

"Are you kidding? If the horse wins I lose about $300. Big deal. But if he gets upset I make a quick thousand. No spreading, thanks. I'm sitting on this one."

I went back to the office and awaited the results of the race with mixed emotions. I didn't want Gino to lose all that money, yet it might be therapeutic for him, help rid him of the notion that he was going to make a killing easily.

Brent had a transistor radio and we fidgeted over it as the announcer gave the results at Santa Anita. Then it came, the first race at Hempstead Downs. The winner was Sir Keno. I didn't know whether to shout or groan, but didn't have chance to do either because of the next words over the radio.

"Sir Keno went off at odds of twenty-five to one and paid $52.60 to win."

Somehow I found a chair and was grateful for its support. Brent was banging the radio against the desk, shouting, "It's a trick—some kind of electronic trick."

For one wild desperate moment I believed him. How else account for the staggering payoff on such a prohibitive favorite? It meant that Lucas owed Gino over $25,000! And since I had placed the bet I would come under suspicion of being an accomplice.

Brent was half right: it was a trick, but not of the electronic variety. Gino had not tampered with the wire services or the radio broadcasting equipment. He had manipulated the race itself.

Gino had visited Hempstead Downs once without mentioning it to any of us. He knew, without Lucas telling him, the small amount of money being wagered on each race. He saw that even less was bet on the horses in the first race, since most fans were busy buying their Daily Double tickets. His plan crystallized that day and he had only to wait for an unbeatable horse to be running in the first race. Sir Keno was the answer to his prayers.

After giving me the $1000 to

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bet with Lucas, Gino went upstate to the track. As soon as the mutuel windows opened he bet $4000 on the *worst horse* in the race. The tote board, on the next flash, showed this inept equine as the 2-to-5 favorite. Sir Keno ballooned to 20-to-1. A buzz of excitement went through the crowd. Many calculated that someone had inside information on the steed that had shown no form to date; they rushed to the windows to get down on the "hot" horse.

When Sir Keno left the gate at 25-to-1 and won by four lengths, Gino happily tore up $4000 worth of losing tickets and ran for the bus that would take him back to Los Angeles and his big $25,000 payoff from Lucas.

The strange thing is that no one will believe that I'm innocent of complicity. Only I know how completely I was used. As a result, both Gino and I are barred from the bookie's. And Lucas will accept no large wagers on horses running at any of the small out-of-town tracks.

Gino now has a new enthusiasm—the jai alai games in Mexico. He has become very friendly with Joe Cortez, who writes up the games, and Joe, flattered by all this sudden attention, has been explaining how the people bet right there at the games. Someone really should warn Cortez of the danger he faces in befriending and teaching Gino.

But did anyone warn me?

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a *NEW* detective story by

GERALD KERSH

Dr. Pelikan, the eminent psychiatrist, was not only able to project his will through Space and into another person's brain, he could also project it through Time. And because Dr. Pelikan had finally mastered these techniques, there ensued a deadly duel between the psychiatrist and the mad, savage killer, Papke the Ripper—one of the strangest duels in detective fiction . . .

DR. OX WILL DIE AT MIDNIGHT

by GERALD KERSH

"INSPECTOR, PLEASE PAY ATTENtion. This is terribly serious. I am Dr. Pelikan, psychiatrist, of the Magog Asylum."

"I am honored to meet the celebrated Dr. Pelikan. What can I do for you?"

"Order four or five of your strongest officers to guard the apartment of my colleague, Dr. Ox!"

"But why?"

"Because tonight, at midnight, Papke the Ripper plans to murder him."

"But Dr. Pelikan, Papke the Ripper is in a padded cell in your own asylum."

"I know, I know! But all the same I warn you, I warn you!"

"Very well, Doctor. But let us first discuss it calmly. Have a cigar. Please step into my office. You do not mind if the Sergeant also listens?"

"Not at all."

"You have no objection to my locking the door?"

"No, no! But please be quick. There is no time to lose."

The big door closed, the heavy lock clicked. The tiny doctor, his haggard face macerated by insomnia, sat opposite the gigantic Inspector, whose cigar, gripped hard between his iron jaws, stuck out under his stone-gray mustache.

"Tell me, Doctor, is not Papke sufficiently guarded?"

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"Inspector, he is locked in a cell from which a fly could not escape, in a corridor through which a mouse could not pass without attracting attention. Nevertheless, send four men to guard the apartment of Dr. Ox—otherwise Papke the Ripper will murder him at midnight."

"But how can you possibly believe that?"

"I see that you do not take me seriously. If I explain, will you do as I say?"

"Certainly, Doctor."

"Very well. Listen. It sounds fantastic, but it is the most serious thing in the world. You have heard of me. I know the minds of madmen better than anybody else on earth. I have devoted my entire life to the study of the insane—"

"I have read your *Studies in the Psychopathology of the Murderer,* Doctor."

"Good. Then I can be brief. Two years ago I had a certain argument with Dr. Ox. In short, we discussed the physical basis of thought. I argued that it was possible for the intellect to operate independently, apart from the physical brain. Ox laughed. 'A theory,' he said, 'a fantasy they call ESP.'

" 'A fact,' I replied, 'and I will prove it.'

" 'I wager five hundred kronen you cannot,' said Dr. Ox.

"I said, 'Very well. Tonight, when you go to your room, stay awake until three o'clock. Take a book to bed with you. Read it; make a marginal note. In the morning I will quote to you the exact words you have read and written.'

"'That is a bet,' said Dr. Ox."

"But could you?" asked the Inspector.

"Yes. The higher faculties, the intellect and the will, are separable from the body. I could show you how. This, in a nutshell, is the technique. Wait until the small hours of the morning, when everything is quiet, when physical energy is at its lowest ebb. Lie down comfortably in the dark. Concentrate every shred of your will on yourself: see yourself as a body, lying on your bed.

"Endeavor to project your sight and your powers of reasoning to a point two or three feet above the center of your body. Then look down on yourself with a detached mind. Practise this. Try and try. Fifty times, a hundred times, you will fail. Then you may succeed. Make your mind travel across your room. Observe every object, but ignore obstacles. *Will* yourself through walls and doors.

"Cover only familiar ground, going from object to object, observing every inch of the way. In this manner you may project your mind into another room, another house—even to another city."

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"That would be a useful accomplishment for people involved in espionage, Dr. Pelikan."

"Please do not interrupt. I was telling you of my wager with Dr. Ox. Dr. Ox lives in the apartment immediately above mine. I had been there a hundred times. It was easy. I won my wager.

"When we met the next morning, at eleven o'clock, I said to him, 'You were sitting up in bed, in new red pajamas, reading *Dead Souls,* by Gogol. On page three hundred and eight, where Murazoff says to Tchitchikoff, "Yes, it seems to me that you could prove a *bogatuir,*" you wrote in the margin: *Here the conscious weakness of Gogol takes its revenge on the iron will of Tchitchikoff.* Then you put out the light.'

"Dr. Ox was amazed. I tell you this in order that you may not disbelieve the amazing facts that follow. This happened, you understand, two years ago. Even when I was highly skilled in the technique of the experiment. But since then I have acquired an infinitely higher efficiency, and if you doubt me I am prepared to prove every word I say."

"No, no," said the Inspector. "Please proceed."

"I began to project my mind into the cells of the asylum, at night. I am familiar with every stone in the building, so it was not difficult. I took the opportunity of making observations of the inmates. True, I achieved nothing of very great practical value; but it was interesting.

"Then a year ago, they brought in Papke the Ripper."

"A dangerous man, that, Dr. Pelikan."

"A horrible man, Inspector! A devil, a perfect devil. Investigating that man's mind was like diving down and down into a bottomless pit full of horrors, as in one of those frightful Oriental legends—an abyss without end—a hell, I tell you! A—"

"You have broken your cigar, Dr. Pelikan. Permit me to offer you another."

"Thank you. Excuse my emotion. Papke was terrible—a beast, possessed of a tremendous elemental force—less than a man, but far more terrible than any animal. He used, in fact, to wrestle with bears in a circus. Oh, why didn't they hang him when he murdered that poor little girl, instead of sending him to me? He gloated, secretly, over the memories of fifteen horrible murders—"

"Fifteen!"

"Fifteen. And he had all the intuitions of the wild animal. He could tell when an eye was looking at him. I tried many times to watch him through a secret spyhole in his cell. He would sit like a statue, and say nothing. Later he would say to me, 'And

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did you enjoy watching me earlier this afternoon?' We could do nothing with him.

"All the doctors and attendants were afraid of him. But one night I projected my mind into his cell, and, watching him as he lay asleep, I thought I might actually get *inside his brain,* and wrestle with him, intellect against intellect, will against will, out of the reach of his awful hands."

"Good God, Doctor! And did you?"

"I tried, night after night, for eight weeks. Finally I succeeded. The intellect of Dr. Pelikan found itself side by side with the mind of Papke the Ripper. And what I saw horrified me. I watched plan after plan rise to the surface of his amazingly cunning and tortuous mind, like bubbles in a cesspool. And at the basis of each plan was a weapon—a razor.

"He has a genius for concealment. Stripped, bathed, and thoroughly searched, he had nevertheless managed to bring with him the blade of a French razor, which he had hidden in the padding of his cell. I forced my will, then, to fight against him. I ordered him to surrender this weapon. My order must have come to him as an impulse. 'Here, take this away from me,' he said—while his real self shrieked, *Kill, kill!*

"Inspector, I have fought many battles of will, but never a battle like that. The savagery of Papke the Ripper beat at me like a high wind. And it won! At the last instant, when I thought victory was mine, the proximity of the attendant and the feel of steel combined with his blood lust to unleash an absolute typhoon of ferocity. He leaped away, out of my control.

"A child might as well have tried to hold back a mad bull. With one slash he almost severed the hand of the attendant. The blood lust boiled up in him like a volcano. I was scorched, flung away. I saw him, waving the red-stained razor above his head. My nerve broke. I fled. Morning found me, sick and terrified, worn out by the struggle, and obsessed by the fearful memory of that hour in the soul of Papke the Ripper.

"But the very next night I went back—back into the brain of Papke, and fought against it. I fought powerful memories of ancient evil pleasures. I fought strong resolutions, even as they formed. I struggled between memory and resolution—but it was like trying to hold back the North Sea.

"I withdrew. Then I thought: *Although I cannot overcome the beast, why should I not forestall him?* I became even more ambitious. If I could send my will through Space, then why not through the other dimension,

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Time? And you must believe me, Inspector, when I assure you that I succeeded, in a small way. Yes. After the most agonizing efforts my disembodied mind was projected through short distances of time. First, one hour. Then three, then eight. And finally twenty-four hours. I am too weak to do more than that, but that much I can do."

"A useful accomplishment if one happens to be a gambler on horses, Doctor."

"Ask my bookie exactly how much I have won from him in the last six weeks! He will tell you—five hundred and seventy thousand kronen. But that is unimportant. I can move twenty-four hours ahead in time. That is why I am here, warning you—warning you to guard, with four of your strongest men, with their revolvers out of the their holsters, the apartment of Dr. Ox who, as surely as I am sitting here, is going to be torn to pieces, dismembered, horribly murdered by Papke the Ripper tonight at midnight."

"Well, Doctor, if you insist—"

"I do. And I will tell you why. Last night a curious thing happened. I was worn out. I lay down on my bed, intending to project my will into the cell of Papke. But I was too tired. I fell asleep. My vitality was low, very low. I believe that my mind slipped away from my body of its own accord. Less vividly than during consciousness—as in a bad dream—I found myself in the mind of Papke the Ripper, not fighting it, but involved in it. It was like drowning in a well. I saw the completion of his resolution to kill Dr. Ox tonight, together with his plan."

"What plan?"

"I do not know. It was vague. It was simple. It was brutal, bloody, horrible. I awoke trembling. I tried to cast my will forward a few hours. Again my mind slipped over hours of time of its own accord. This time I saw everything vividly. I saw myself in Dr. Ox's room, looking down on something I had discovered—all that was left of my dear colleague, my old friend, Dr. Ox.

"Then I saw myself running—running here—and somewhere in the shadows I saw the face of Papke the Ripper, laughing, laughing . . . This will happen tonight, Inspector, at midnight. And that is why I am here—to beg you quickly, quickly, to send four, six, ten of your strongest men to save Dr. Ox from Papke the Ripper, who will be at large with a knife in the streets of this city at midnight! I beg you—call me insane, if you will, but act on my intuition before midnight. I am a little incoherent—that is because I am worn out with overwork, and

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insomnia, and too much anxiety. Dr. Ox will die at midnight!"

"Tonight?"

"Yes, yes."

"Very well, Dr. Pelikan."

"You will do as I say?"

"Certainly."

"Thank you, Inspector, thank you a thousand times!"

"Please do not mention it, Doctor. On the contrary, it is I who have to thank you. Sergeant, call in Officers Paschkes, Schoff, Vasatko, and Schmidt," said the Inspector.

Four huge police officers came in.

"But Dr. Pelikan, may I ask you one more question?"

"Of course, Inspector."

"First of all, another cigar."

"Thank you, Inspector."

"In your vision of last night where did Papke the Ripper hide the head?"

"The head of Dr. Ox?"

"Yes."

"In the cistern."

"Thank you, Dr. Pelikan. You did not mind my asking that last question?"

"Not at all."

"That, you see, was the only portion of Dr. Ox which we were unable to find."

Dr. Pelikan stared.

"It will not be tonight at midnight," said the Inspector. "Papke is still in his cell. It was today at midday. Since then we have been looking everywhere for you, Doctor. Now, Sergeant—"

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MANHATTAN NIGHTS' ENTERTAINMENT

by AVRAM DAVIDSON

THIS ALL TOOK PLACE A WHILE back. . .

It was a crisp evening in middle April.

Cornelius Goodeycoonce, the river pirate, headed his plunder-laden boat straight at an apparently solid wall of pilings, steering with the calm of a ferry-boat captain nearing a slip, and cut his motor.

Up in Central Park, where he was kipped out in a secluded cave, Arthur Marmaduke Roderick Lodowicke William Rufus de Powisse-Plunkert, 11th Marquess of Grue and Groole in the Peerage of England, 22nd Baron Bogle

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in the Peerage of Scotland, 6th Earl of Ballypatcoogen in the Peerage of Ireland, Viscount Penhokey in the Peerage of the United Kingdom, Laird of Muckle Greet, Master of Snee, and Hereditary Lord High Keeper of the Queen's Bears, heard a familiar beat of wings in the night and held out a slice of bread just in time to catch a medium-rare charcoal-broiled steak.

Not a mile away the Grand Master of the Mafia, Don Alexander Borjia, admired for the ten-thousandth time the eternally enigmatic smile on the lips of the *original* Mona Lisa, which hung, as it had for 50 years, on the wall of the Chamber of the order's Grand Council.

A certain foreign visitor, who called himself Tosci, came down the gangway ladder on the side of the yacht which in daylight flew the flag of the landlocked nation whose citizenship he claimed, and got gingerly into the launch which was to bear him to shore.

Daisy Smith, in her trim and tiny bachelor-girl apartment, prepared herself a tuna-fish sandwich without enthusiasm, and reflected how much more—how very much more—she would rather be preparing, say, roast beef and potatoes for a young man, if only she knew a young man she considered worth preparing roast beef and potatoes for.

And across the North River, on the Jersey shore, a thin line of green still hugged the outline of the cliffs; and over that, a thin line of blue. And then the night rolled all the way down, and the lines of light were lost . . .

The momentum of Cornelius' boat carried it swiftly toward the bulkhead. A crash seemed inevitable. Then Cornelius picked up an oar and prodded one certain timber well below the waterline. Instantly a section of the pilings swung open, just wide enough and just high enough for the boat to pass through; then it swung shut once more.

The boat proceeded onward in gathering darkness as the light from the river dimmed behind it. Gauging the precise instant when the momentum would cease to propel his boat against the mild current of Coenties' Kill—walled in and walled over these 150 years—the man lowered his oar and began to pole. The eyes of an alligator flashed briefly, then submerged.

Presently a light showed itself some distance off, then vanished, reappeared, vanished once more in the windings of the sluggish creek, and finally revealed itself, hissing whitely, as a Coleman lamp. It sat on a stone lip of what had been a fairly well-frequented landing in the days when De Witt Clinton was Mayor and Jacob Hays was High Con-

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stable of the City of New York. Cheap as labor had been in those days—and fill even cheaper—it had been less expensive to vault up rather than bury the Kill when the needs of the growing metropolis demanded the space. Experience had proved that to be the case when other Manhattan "kills" or streams, refusing meekly to submit to burial, had flooded cellars and streets.

The Goodeycoonce-the-river-pirate of that time had noted, marked, mapped, and made the private excavations. They were an old, old family, loath to change what was even then an old family trade.

"Well, now, let's see—" said the present-day Cornelius. He tied up. He unloaded his cargo onto a pushcart, placed the lamp in a bracket, and slowly trundled the cart over the stone paving of the narrow street, which had echoed to no other traffic since it lost the light of the sun so long ago.

At the head of the incline the path passed under an archway of later construction. The Goodeycoonce-of-*that*-time, trusting no alien hand, had learned the mason's trade himself, breaking in onto a lovely, dry, smooth tunnel made and abandoned forever by others—the first, last, and short-lived horse-car subway. The wheels of the pushcart fitted perfectly into the tracks, and the grade was level.

Granny Goodeycoonce was reading her old Dutch family Bible in the snug apartment behind her second-hand store. That is, not exactly *reading* it; it had been generations since any member of the family could actually read Dutch; she was looking at the pictures. Her attention was diverted from a copperplate engraving of the she-bear devouring the striplings who had so uncouthly mocked the Prophet Elisha with the words, *Go up, baldhead* ("Serve them right!" she declared. "Bunch of junvenile delinquents!"), by a thumping from below.

She closed the Book and descended to the cellar, where her only grandchild was hauling his plunder up through the trap door.

"Put out that *lamp*, Neely!" she said sharply. "Gasoline costs *money!*"

"Yes, Granny," the river pirate said obediently.

Denny the Dip stared in stupefaction at the sudden appearance of a steak sandwich's most important ingredient. Then he stared at the winged visitor which had appeared a second after the steak. The winged visitor stared back—or, perhaps "glared" would be the *mot juste*—out of burning yellow eyes. "Cheest!" said Denny the Dip.

There had been a time when, so skillful was The Dip, that he

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had picked the pocket of a Police Commissioner while the latter was in the very act of greeting a Queen. (He had returned the wallet later, of course, via the mails, out of courtesy, and, of course, minus the money.) But Time with her wingéd Flight, and all that—age and its concomitant infirmities, much aggravated by a devotion to whatever Celtic demigod presides over the demijohn—had long rendered The Dip unfit for such professional gestures.

For some years now he had been the bane of the Mendicant Squad. His method was to approach lone ladies with the pitch that he was a leper, that they were not to come any nearer, but were to drop some money on the sidewalk for him. This, with squeaks of dismay, they usually did. But on one particular evening—this one, in fact—the lone lady he had approached turned out to be a retired medical missionary; she delivered a lecture on the relative merits of chaulmoogra oil and the sulfonamides in the treatment of Hansen's Disease ("—not contagious in New York, and never was—"), expressed her doubts that The Dip suffered from anything worse than, say, ichthyosis; and the paper she gave him was neither Silver Certificate nor Federal Reserve Note, but the address of a dermatologist.

Her speech had lasted a good quarter of an hour, and was followed by some remarks on Justification Through Faith, the whole experience leaving Denny weak and shaken. He had just managed to totter to one of those benches which a benevolent municipality disposes at intervals along Central Park West, and sink down, when he was espied by the 22nd Baron and 11th Marquess aforesaid, Arthur Marmaduke et cetera, who was walking his dog, Guido.

The dog gave Denny a perfunctory sniff, and growled condescendingly. Denny, semi-subliminally, identified it as a whippet, reidentified it as an Italian greyhound, looked up suddenly and whimpered, "Lord Grey and Gore?"

"Grue and Groole," the dog's master corrected him. "Who the juice are you?" The dog was small and whipcord-thin and marked with many scars. So was his master. The latter was wearing a threadbare but neat bush-jacket, jodhpurs, veldt-schoen, a monocle, and a quasi-caracul cap of the sort which are sold three-for-two-rupees in the Thieves' Bazaar at Peshawar. He scowled, peered through his monocled eye, which was keen and narrow, the other being wide and glassy.

"Cor flog the flaming crows!" he exclaimed. "Dennis! Haven't seen you since I fingered that fat

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fool for you aboard the *Leviathan* in '26. Or was it '27? Demned parvenu must have had at least a thousand quid in his wallet, which you were supposed to divide with me fifty-fifty, but didn't; eh?"

"Sixty-forty in my favor was the agreement," Denny said feebly. "Have you got the price of a meal or a drink on yez, perchance?"

"Never spend money on food *or* drink," said the Marquess primly. "Against my principles. Come along, come along," he said, prodding The Dip with his swagger stick, "and I'll supply you with scoff *and* wallop, you miserable swine."

The Dip, noting the direction they were taking, expressed his doubt that he could make it through the Park.

"I don't live *through* the Park, I live *in* the Park, mind your fat head, you bloody fool!" They had left the path and were proceeding—master and hound as smoothly as snakes, Denny rather less so—behind trees, up rocks, between bushes, under low-hanging boughs. And so came at last to the cave. "Liberty Hall!" said the Marquess. "After you, you miserable bog-oaf."

A charcoal fire glowed in a tiny stove made from stones, mud, and three automobile license plates. A kettle hummed on it, a teapot sat beside it, in one corner was a bed of evergreen sprigs covered with a rather good Tientsin rug woven in the archaic two blues and a buff, and a Tibetan butter-lamp burned on a ledge. There was something else in the cave, something which lunged at Denny and made fierce noises.

"Cheest!" he cried. "A baby eagle!" And fell back.

"Don't be a damned fool," his host exclaimed pettishly. "It's a fully grown falcon, by name Sauncepeur . . . There, my precious, there, my lovely. A comfit for you." And he drew from one of his pockets what was either a large mouse or a small rat and offered it to the falcon. Sauncepeur swallowed it whole. "Just enough to whet your appetite, not enough to spoil the hunt. Come, my dearie. Come up, sweetheart, come up."

The Marquess had donned a leather gauntlet and unleashed the bird from the perch. Sauncepeur mounted his wrist. Together they withdrew from the cave; the man muttered, the bird muttered back, a wrist was thrown up and out, there was a beating of wings, and the falconer returned alone, stripping off his gauntlet.

"Now for some whiskey . . . Hot water? Cold? Pity I've no melted yak butter to go with—one grew rather used to it after a bit in Tibet; cow butter is no good—got no body. What,

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straight? As you please."

Over the drink the 11th Marquess of Grue and Groole filled in his visitor on his career since '25—or was it '26? "Poached rhino in Kenya, but that's all over now, y'know. What with the Blacks, the Arabs, and the East Injians, white man hasn't got a prayer in that show—poaching, I mean. Ran the biggest fantan game in Macao for a while, but with the price opium's got to, hardly worthwhile.

"Signed a contract to go find the Abominable Snowman, demned Sherpas deserted only thirty days out, said the air was too thin for their lungs that high up, if you please, la-de-da—left me short on supplies, so that when I finally found the blasted *yeti*, I had to eat it. No good without curry, you know, no good a-tall.

"Lost m'right eye about that time, or shortly after. Altercation with a Sikh in Amritsar. Got a glass one. Lid won't close, muscle wonky, y'know. Natives in Portuguese East used to call me Bwana-Who-Sleeps-With-One-Eye-Waking; wouldn't come within a hundred yards after I'd kipped down for the night."

He paused to thrust a Sobranie black-and-gold into a malachite cigarette holder and lit it at the fire. With the dull red glow reflected in his monocle and glass eye, smoke suddenly jutting forth from both nostrils, and the (presumably) monkey skull he held in one hand for an ashtray as he sat cross-legged in the cave, the wicked Marquess looked very devilish indeed to the poor Dip, who shivered a bit, and surreptitiously took another peg of whiskey from the flask.

"No, no," the Marquess went on, "to anyone used to concealing himself in Mau Mau, Pathan, and EOKA country, avoiding the attention of the police in Central Park is child's play. Pity about the poor old Fakir of Ipi, but then, his heart always was a bit dicky. Still, they've let Jomo out of jail. As for Colonel Dighenes—"

And it was brought to the attention of the bewildered Dip that the Marquess had fought *for*, and not against, the Mau Maus, Pathans, EOKAs, et cetera. The nearest he came to explaining this was, "Always admired your Simon Girty chap, y'know. Pity people don't scalp any more—here, give over that flask, you pig, before you drink it all. It's a point of honor with me never to steal more than one day's rations at a time.

"Travel light, live off the country. I was one of only two White men in my graduating class at Ah Chu's College of Thieves in Canton. Took my graduate work at Kaffir Ali's, Cairo. I suppose you little reck, miserable fellow that you are, that *I was the last man to be tried by a jury of*

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his peers before the House of Lords! True, I did take the Dowager's Daimler, and, true, I sold it—lost the money at baccarat—never trust an Azerbaijanian at cards, but—"

He stopped, harkened to some sound in the outer darkness. "I fancy I hear my saucy Sauncepeur returning. 'What gat ye for supper, Lord Randall, my son?'—eh? Chops, steak, Cornish rock hen, what? Curious custom you Americans have—charcoal grills on your balconies. Though, mind, I'm not complaining. Bread ready? *Ahhh,* my pretty!"

The steak was just fine, as far as Denny the Dip was concened, though Lord Grue and Groole complained there was a shade too much garlic. "Mustn't grumble, however—the taste of the Middle Classes is constantly improving."

The man who called himself Tosci rose to his feet.

"Don Alexander Borgia, I presume?" he inquired.

"No, no, excuse me—Borjia—with a 'j'," the Grand Master corrected him. The Grand Master was a tall, dark, handsome man, with a head of silvery-gray hair. "The Grand Council is waiting," he said, "to hear your proposition. This way."

"I had no idea," Tosci murmured, impressed, "that the headquarters of the Mafia were quite so—quite so—" He waved his hand, indicating an inability to find the *mot juste* to fit the high-toned luxury and exquisite good taste of the surroundings.

"This is merely the Chamber of the Grand Council," said Don Alexander. "The actual headquarters, which we are required by our charter to maintain, is in back of a candy store on Mulberry Street. The dead weight of tradition, huh? Well, pretty soon that time will come of which the political philosophers have predicted, when the State shall wither away. 'No more Tradition's chains will bind us,' yeah? After you." Don Alexander took his seat at the head of the table and gestured the visitor to begin.

The latter gazed at the assembled Masters of the Mafia, who gazed back, unwinking, unblinking, but not—he was quite sure—unthinking.

After a moment he began, *"Signori—"* and paused; "then, *Fratelli—"*

—and was interupted by Grand Master Borjia.

"Excuse me, Hare Tosci, or Monsoon Tosci, or however you say in your country, but evidently you have fallen victim to the false delusion that the Mafia is a strictly Eyetalian organization, which I have no hesitation in saying it is a nerroneous concept and a misinformation disseminated by the misinformed press, see? I would like it clearly understood

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that you should get it through your head we of the sorely misconstrued and much maligned Mafia do not discriminate in any way, shape, or form, against race, creed, color, national or'gin, or, uh, what the hell is the other thing which we don't discriminate against in any way, shape, or form, somebody?"

"Previous kahn-dition of soivitood," said a stocky Grand Councilor, wearing a Brooks Brothers suit, two cauliflower ears, and an eyepatch.

"Yeah. Thanks very much, Don Lefty McGonigle."

"Nat a-tall," said Don Lefty, with a slight blush, as he bent his slightly broken nose toward the orchid in his buttonhole—one of three flown up for him daily from Bahía. "'Rank is but d'guinea stamp, an' a man's a man for all dat,'" he added. "A quotation from d' poet Boyns; no offensive ettnic connotations intended."

"Exactly," said the Grand Master, a slight scowl vanishing from his distinguished features. "Our Grand Council is a veritable microcosm of American opportunity, as witness, besides myself, Don Lefty McGonigle, Don Shazzam X—formerly Rastus Washington—Don Gesú-María Gomez, Don Leverret Lowell Cabot, Don Swede Swanson, Don Tex Thompson, Don Morris Caplan, and Don Wong Hua-Fu, which he's the Temporary Member of the Permanent Representation of the Honorable Ten Tongs—in a word, a confraternity of American business and professional men devoted to the study of the Confucian classics, the Buddhist Scriptures, and the art of horticulture as it might be exemplified by the peaceful cultivation of the *ah-peen* poppy."

He paused and drew breath. "The Mafia," he continued, "despite the innumerous slanders and aspersions cast upon it by scoffers, cynics, and the ever-present envious, is no more than a group of humble citizens of the world, determined to provide, besides certain commercial services, a forum wherein or whereby to arbitrate those differences which the lack of communication—alas, all too prevalent in our society—might otherwise terminate untowardly; as to its supposed origins in romantic Sicily, who, indeed, can say? What's on your mind, Tosci?" he concluded abruptly.

Mr. (or Herr, or Monsieur, or whatever way they say in his country) Tosci blinked. Then he smiled a small noncommittal smile, appropriate to the citizen of a neutral nation.

"As you are aware, my country is landlocked," he began. "Despite, or perhaps because of this situation, the question of providing a merchant marine of our

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own arises from time to time. It has arisen lately. My company, the *Societé Anonyme de la Banque de la Commerce et de l'Industrie et pour les Droites des Oeuvriers et des Paysans,* known popularly and for convience as *Paybanque,* is currently interested in the possibilities of such a project.

"It is those 'certain commercial services' of the Mafia, of which you spoke, that we propose to engage. Our merchant marine headquarters in the New World would naturally be located in the New York City port area. Although at the present time the North River, or such New Jersey areas as Hoboken or Bayonne are most heavily favored by shipping, it was not always so. It is our opinion that excellent possibilities exist along the East River side of Manhattan, particularly the lower East River.

"It is our desire therefore that you provide us with a land, sea, and air survey, largely but not exclusively photographic in nature, engaging for the duration of the survey more or less centrally located quarters on the waterfront area in this locale. Something in the neighborhood of the Williamsburg Bridge would be ideal. Our representatives would participate with you, though the home office, so to speak, would remain aboard my yacht.

"This portfolio," he went on, placing it on the table and opening it, "contains a more detailed description of our proposal, as well as the eleven million dollars in United States Treasury Notes which your Northern European contact informed us would be your fee for considering the proposal. If you are agreeable to undertake the work, we can discuss further terms."

He ceased to speak. After a moment the Grand Master said, "Okay. We will leave you know." After Tosci had departed, Don Alexander asked, "Well, what do you think."

"An Albanian Trotskyite posing as a Swiss Stalinist. If you ask me, I think he wants to blow up the Brooklyn Navy Yard," Don Morris Caplan said.

"Of *course* he wants to blow up the Brooklyn Navy Yard," Borjia snapped. "That was obvious right from the beginning—I can spot them Albanian deviationists a mile away. Now the point is: Do we *want* the Brooklyn Navy Yard blown up? It is to this question, my esteemed fellow colleagues, which we must now divert our attention."

Events went their traditional way in the Goodeycoonce household. Granny had dressed herself up as though for a masquerade, the principal articles of costume consisting of a tasseled cap, a linen blouse with wide sleeves, a pair of even wider breeches, and wood-

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en shoes; all these articles were very, very old. She next picked up a pipe of equally antique design, with a long cherrywood stem and a hand-painted porcelain bowl, and this she proceeded to charge with genuine Indian Leaf tobacco which she had shredded herself in her chopping bowl. The tobacco was purchased at regular intervals from the last of the Manahatta Indians—that is, he was one-eighth Last-of-the Manahatta-Indians, on his mother's side—who operated the New Orleans Candle and Incense Shop on Lexington Avenue. ("*I* don't know what them crazy White folks want with that stuff," he often said; "they could buy *grass* for the same price.") Granny struck a kitchen match, held it flat across the top of the pipe bowl, and began to puff.

Neely seated himself and took up a spiral notebook and a ballpoint pen. A scowl, or rather a pout, settled on his usually good-natured countenance.

First Granny coughed. Then she gagged. Then she inhaled with a harsh, gasping breath. Then she turned white, then green, then a bright red which might have startled and even alarmed Neely, had he not seen it all happen so often before. Presently she removed the pipe. Her face had taken on an almost masculine appearance. She rolled up one hand into a somewhat loose fist, then the other, then she placed one in alignment with the other and lifted them to her eyes and peered through her simulated telescope.

Neely, in a tone of voice obviously intended as mockery, or at least mimicry, said, " 'To arms, to arms! Blow der drums and beat der trumpet! De dumdam Engels ships ben gesailing up de River!' "

The eye which was not looking through the "telescope" now looked at him, and there was something cold and cruel in it. Neely's own eyes fell. After a moment he mumbled, "Sorry, Oude Piet. I mean Oom Piet. I mean, *darn* it, Heer—um—Governor—ah—Your Highness."

The eye glared at him, then the "telescope" shifted. After a while a heavily accented and guttural voice, quite unlike his grandmother's usual tones, came from her throat and announced, in a businesslike drone, "Shloop by der vharf in Communipaw. Beaver pelts—"

Neely clicked his tongue in annoyance. "You're in the wrong century, darn it, now!" he cried. Again, the cold old eye glared at him. But he stood his ground. "Come on, now," he said. "A promise is a promise. What would the *Com*pany say?"

The "telescope" shifted again. The drone recommenced. "Pier Dvendy-Zeven—Durkish Zigarettes—Zipahi brand—vhatchman gedding dronk—"

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Neely's ballpoint scribbled rapidly. *"That's* the ticket!" he declared.

Daisy Smith finished the tuna-fish sandwich (no mayonnaise—a girl has to watch those calories every single *min*ute) and washed the dish. For dessert she had half a pear. Then the question could no longer be postponed—what was she going to *do* that evening. It had all seemed so simple, back in Piney Woods, New Jersey: she would take her own savings, all $80, plus the $500 or so, most of it in old-fashioned long bills, but including the $100 Liberty Bond, which had been found in the much-mended worsted stocking under Uncle Dynus' mattress after his funeral (the note found with it—thise is four *Dasi*—seemed to make traffic with the Surrogate's Court unnecessary), and come to New York. There she would find, in the order named, an apartment, a job, and Someone-To-Go-Out-With.

She had found the first two without much trouble, but the third, which she had thought would proceed from the second, did not materialize. Her employer, Mr. Katachatourian, was the nicest old man in the world, but, though a widower, he was *old;* somehow the importing of St. John's bread—his business—didn't seem to attract *young* men. And if, from time to time, with trepidation, he took a flyer on a consignment of sesame seeds, or pistachio nuts, it helped Daisy's prospects not at all. The jobbing of sesame seeds, or pistachio nuts, attracted exactly the same sort of gentlemen as did the jobbing of St. John's bread—either middle-aged and married, or elderly.

Once, to be sure, and once only, Daisy had made a social contact from her job. Mr. Imamoglu, one of the largest exporters of St. John's bread on the eastern Aegean littoral, had come to New York on business, had dropped in to see his good customer, The Katachatourian Trading Company, and had immediately fallen in love with Daisy. With true Oriental opulence he took her out every night for a week. He took her to the opera, to the St. Regis, to the Horse Show at Madison Square Garden, to Jack Dempsey's restaurant, to a Near Eastern night club on Ninth Avenue, to Hamburger Heaven, to a performance of *Phèdre* in the original French, to the Bowery Follies, and to a triple-feature movie house on 42nd Street which specialized in technicolor Westerns, of which Mr. Imamoglu was inordinately fond.

Then he proposed marriage.

Well, the prospect of living in a strawberry-ice-cream-pink-

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villa in the fashionable suburb of Karsiyaka across the picturesque Bay from the romantic port of Izmir, where she would be waited on, hand and foot, by multitudes of servants, *did* appeal to Daisy. But although Mr. Imamoglu assured her that both polygamy and the harem were things of the past in Turkey, that, in fact, neither veil nor *yashmak* could be procured for love or money in all his country, still, you know, *after all*. And furthermore, Mr. Imamoglu was somewhat on in years; he must have been in his thirties.

And besides, she didn't love him.

So Daisy said No.

The departure of the semi-disconsolate exporter left Daisy's evenings emptier than before. Go to church? Why, bless you, of course she went to church, every single Sunday, sometimes twice, and met a number of young men who played the organ or were in the choir or conducted a Sunday-school class. Most of them lived in the YMCA and were careful to explain to Daisy that it would be many, many years before they could even begin to *think* of marriage; and their ideas of a social evening were quite different from Mr. Imamoglu's; they would arrange to meet her somewhere after supper and then go to a free illustrated lecture on the Greenland missions; followed by a cup of coffee or a coke, followed by a chaste farewell at the subway kiosk.

Sometimes a girl thought she might just as well be back in Piney Woods, New Jersey.

What, then, to do tonight? Wash her hair? Watch TV? Catch up on her letters? Mending? Solo visit to a movie? She decided to take a walk.

A few blocks from her apartment she saw a familiar trio leaning in familiar stances against a wall. They nudged one another as they saw Daisy coming, as they had the first time and as they did every time. By now she knew there would be no wolf whistles, no rude proposals.

"Good evening, miss."

"G' evening, miss."

"Evening, miss."

"Good evening," Daisy said, pausing. "Oh, look at your new hats!" she exclaimed. "White fedoras. My goodness. Aren't they nice."

The three men beamed and smirked, and readjusted their brims. "All the big fellows wear white fedoras," said the leader of the trio, whose name was Forrance.

"The big fellows?"

"Sure. Like on that, now, TV show, *The Unthinkables*. Al—Lucky—Baby Face—*you* know."

As Forrance mentioned these people his two associates pursed

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lips and nodded soberly. One was quite small and suffered from nosebleeds. ("Must be a low pressure rarea comin' down from Canada," he would mumble; "I c'n alwees tell: Omma reggella human brommeter.") He was known, quite simply, as Blood.

His companion, as if in compensation, was obese in the extreme. ("A glanjalla condition," was his explanation; he indignantly denied gluttony. Taxed with overeating, he pleaded a tapeworm. "It's not f' *me*," was his indignant cry, over a third helping of breaded pork chops and French fries; *"it's f' the woim!"*) Not unexpectedly he was called Guts. Now and then he pretended that it was an acknowledgement of personal courage.

"Al?" Daisy repeated. "Lucky? Baby Face? White fedoras? *The Unthinkables?* But *you're* not *gang*sters?" she burst out. *"Are* you?" For, as often as she had seen them, she had never thought to ask their trade.

Forrance drew himself u p. Blood slouched. Guts loomed. A look of pleased importance underlay the grim look they assumed at the question. "Listen," Forrance began, out of the side of his mouth, an effect instantly spoiled by his adding, "miss."

"Listen, miss, you ever hear of—" he paused, glanced around, drew nearer—"the Nafia?" He thrust his right hand into his coat pocket. So did his two lieutenants. Daisy said, No, she never did; and at once the three were cast down. Was it, she asked helpfully, anything like the Mafia? Forrance brightened, B l o o d brightened, Guts brightened.

*"Sump*thing like the Mafia," said Forrance. "Om really very surprised you never—but you're from outatown, aintcha?"

"But what do you *do?"* Daisy demanded, mildly thrilled, but somehow not in the l e a s t frightened.

"We control," said Forrance impressively, *"all the gumball and Indian nut machines south of Vesey Street!"*

"My goodness," said Daisy. "Uh—are there many?"

"We are now awaiting delivery of the first of our new fleet of trucks," said Forrance formally.

"Well," said Daisy, "Lots of luck. I've got to go now. Good night."

"Good night, miss."

"G' night, miss."

"Night, miss."

The crisp air was so stimulating that Daisy walked a considerable distance past her usual turning-around point, and then decided to come home by a different route, window shopping on the way. And in one window she noted many good buys in linoleum and tarpaulins, ships' chandlery, bar-and-grill supplies, and various other commodities; but somehow

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nothing she really *needed* just at the moment.

Then the flowered organdy caught her eye, but the bolt of blue rayon next to it was just as adorable. She looked up at the sign. THE ALMOST ANYTHING SECOND-HAND GOODS AND OUTLET STORE, it said. Wondering slightly, Daisy opened the door and went in. A bill tinkled. After a moment another door opened and a tall vigorous-looking woman, whose brown hair was turning gray, came in from the back. She smiled politely on seeing Daisy.

"I thought I might get some of that organdy in the window, the one with the flowers, enough for a dress."

"Yes, isn't it lovely? I'll get it for you right away. Was there anything else in the window you liked, while I'm there? Leather goods, outboard motors, canned crabmeat?"

"No, just—"

"Seasoned mahogany, yerba maté, manila hemp? Turkish cigarettes—Sipahi brand?"

"No, just the organdy, and, oh, maybe that blue rayon?"

"That's lovely, too. You have very good taste."

While the lady was reaching into the window, the door at the back opened again and a voice said, "Granny," and then stopped. Daisy turned around. She saw a well-made young man with a healthy open countenance and light brown hair which needed combing. He wore a peacoat, corduroy trousers, and a woolen cap. He stared at Daisy. Then he smiled. Then he blushed. Then he took off his cap.

Daisy instantly decided to buy, not just enough material for a dress, but both entire bolts, plus so large an amount of leather goods, outboard motors, canned crabmeat, seasoned Honduras mahogany, yerba maté, manila hemp, and Turkish Sipahi cigarettes as would leave the proprietor no choice but to say, "Well, you can never carry all that by yourself; my grandson will help you take it home,"—or words to that effect.

What actually happened was quite different. The lady emerged from the window with the bolts of cloth and said, "I really don't know which is the lovelier," then noticed the young man and said, "Yes, Neely?"

"I finished the, uh, *you*-know," said the young man. He continued smiling at Daisy, who was now smiling back.

"Then start stacking the Polish hams," his grandmother directed crisply. "Smash up all those old crates, pile the raw rubber up against the north wall, but not too near the Turkish cigarettes because of the smell. Go on, now."

"Uh—" said Neely, still look-

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ing at the new young customer.

"And when you're finished with *that,*" his grandmother said, "I want all the cork fenders cleaned, and the copper cable unwound from the big reel onto the little ones."

"Uh—"

"Now, never mind. *Uh*—you go and do as I say, or we'll be up all night . . . Neely!"

For a moment the young man hesitated. Then his eyes left Daisy and caught his grandmother's glance. He looked down, swallowed, scraped his boots. "Well?" Neely threw Daisy a single quick glance of helplessness, wistfulness, and embarrassment. He said, "Yes, Granny," turned and went out the door.

Daisy, her purchase under her arm, walked home full of indignation. "There are no young men any more!" she told herself vexedly. "If they're *men,* they're not *young,* and if they're *young,* they're just not *men.* 'Yes, Granny!' How do you like *that?* Oh, I'd 'Yes, Granny' him!" she declared. "I'd show *him* who was boss!" she thought, somewhat inconsistently.

"Milksop!" she concluded. She was surprised to realize that, in her annoyance, she had bought only the flowered organdy. There was really no help for it; much as she despised the grandmother and grandson, if she wanted that blue rayon she would have to revisit THE ALMOST ANYTHING SECOND-HAND GOODS AND OUTLET STORE a second time. Too bad, but it wasn't really *her* fault, was it?

The man called Tosci stepped from the yacht's launch onto the gangway ladder and was steadied by a stubble-faced man in dungarees. "Thank you, boatswain," he said.

"Did you enjoy your visit ashore, M. Tosci?" the bosun asked.

"Ah, New York is such a stimulating city," said Tosci, going up the ladder. "One simply cannot absorb it on a single visit."

He handed his hat to the man, who followed him to his cabin, where he tossed the hat aside, and turned on a device which not only blanked out the sound of their actual conversation against any electronic eavesdropping, but supplied a taped innocuous conversation to be picked up by such devices instead.

"Well?" the "boatswain" demanded.

Tosci shrugged. "Well, Comrade Project Supervisor," he said, "they took the Treasury Notes and said they would let us know. One really could not expect more at the moment."

"I suppose not," the Project Supervisor said gloomily. "Do you think they will *'take the contract,'*

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as I believe the phrase goes?"

"Why should they not, Comrade Project Supervisor? How could they resist the temptation? We are, after all, prepared to go as high as a *hundred* and eleven million dollars. It would take them a long time to collect a hundred and eleven million dollars from their, how do they call it, 'numbers racket'."

"About a week and a half; not more. Well, well, we shall see. Meanwhile, I am hungry. You took your time coming back."

"I am sorry, Comrade Project Supervisor, but—"

"No excuses. Bring me my supper now. And see that the cabbage in the borsht is not soggy as it was last night, and that there are no flies in the yogurt. Do you hear?"

"Yes, Comrade Project Supervisor," said Tosci.

Don Sylvester FitzPatrick, Second Vice-President of the Mafia (Lower Manhattan Branch) and son-in-law of Don Lefty McGonigle, sat brooding in his tiny office in the wholesale foodstuffs district. Despite his title he was a mere petty don in the hierarchy; well did he know that it was rumored he owed even this to nepotism, and these circumstances rankled (as he put it) in his bosom "A man of my attainments, which they should put him in the front ranks of enterprise," he muttered, "and what am I doing? I'm in charge of the artichoke rake-off at the Washington Market!" Don Sylvester laughed bitterly; Don Sylvester sulked.

Meanwhile, in the Grand Chamber Council, discussion among the senior dons went on apace.

"Blowing up the Brooklyn Navy Yard," said Don Tex Thompson reflectively, "might be just the thing the national economy is in need of. Unemployment among skilled laborers went up seven point-oh-nine percent in the last fortnightly period, and among unskilled laborers the figure scores an even higher percentile. The Mafia," he said, "cannot remain indifferent to the plight of the workingman."

"Not if it is to retain that position of esteem and preeminence to which it is rightly entitled," said Don Morris Caplan.

"To say nothing of the excellent effect upon our National Defenses of clearing out all that obsolete equipment and replacing it with the newest devices obtainable through modern science," Don Shazzam X (formerly Rastus Washington) declared. "The Congress could scarcely refuse appropriations in such circumstances."

Don Wong Hua-Fu pursed his thin lips and put the tips of his six-inch fingernails together in church-steeple fashion. "The

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Honorable Ten Tongs do include sound common stocks in the various heavy-metals industries in their portfolio. Still," he said, "we must consider the great burdens already borne by the widows and orphans who constitute the majority of American taxpayers."

And Don Leverret L o w e l l Cabot pointed out another possible objection. "We cannot neglect our own heavy commitments in the Brooklyn Navy Yard area," he said. "As part of o u r responsibility to the men who man our country's ships we have, need I remind the Grand Council, leading interests in the bars, restaurants, night clubs, strip-joints, clip-joints, and gambling hells of the area—to say nothing of the hotels used for both permanent and temporary residence by the many charming ladies who lighten the burdens of the sea-weary sailors."

"It's a problem, believe *me*," sighed Don Gesú-María Gomez. "Little does the public know of our problems."

"Decisions, decisions, decisions!" Don Swede Swanson echoed the sigh.

"Gen-tle-men, gen-tle-men," said Don Lefty McGonigle, a note of mild protest in his hoarse voice. "Aren't we being a lit-tul pre-machua? *We* are not being asked to blow up duh Brooklyn Navy Yahd dis minute. *We* are not even being asked to *decide* if fit should be blown up dis minute. All we are being asked to do, gen-tle-men, is to decide if we are going to make a soyvey of de lowa East Trivva estuary from d' point of view of its amen-i-ties as a pos-si-ble h e a d q u a r t e r s faw moychant marine offices. I yappeal to you, Grand Master, am I creckt?"

Don Alexander Borjia tore his eyes away from the Mona Lisa on the wall. The lineaments of La Gioconda never ceased to entrance him, and there was the added fillip to his pleasure that the rest of the world naively thought the original still hung in the Louvre, little realizing that this last was a mere copy, painted, true, by Leonardo, but b y Leonardo in his ancient age. The switcheroo had been arranged by Don Alexander's father, the late Grand Master Don Cesár Borjia, before the First World War. Copies of masterworks of art, stolen at various times from museums and private collectors around the world, adorned the other walls. But Don Alexander Borjia's favorite remained the Mona Lisa.

"Don Lefty McGonigle is correct," he said. "Take the contract for the survey, charge t h e m eighty-seven million dollars for it, and when it comes time for a decision on the *big* question, so we'll leave them know further. All in favor say *Aye*. Opposed, *Nay*. The Ayes got it."

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There was a silence.

"A foyda question," said Don Lefty finally. He fingered the cabochon emerald which nestled in his watered-silk four-in-hand, and fiddled with his eyepatch.

"Speak."

"Whom is to be ap-poin-ted to take over d' soyvey?"

"Whom did you have in mind?"

"A young man which he oughta be given more responsibility than he's being given, to wit, my son-in-law, the Second Vice-President of the Mafia, Lower Manhattan Branch. Woddaya say, gen-tle-men?"

The pause which followed this suggestion seemed faintly embarrassed. Then Don Swede Swanson was heard to express the opinion that Don Sylvester FitzPatrick couldn't find the seat of his pants in the dark with both hands.

Don Lefty turned to him and pressed both his hands to his chest. "You wound me!" he exclaimed, his voice deep with suppressed emotion. "Night afta night I come home an' my liddle Philomena is eating huh haht out. 'Daddy, Daddy, Daddy,' she asks, weeping, 'what has everybody got against poor Sylvester? Din't he soyve his apprenticeship the same as everybody else? Is-int he loyal? Trustwoythy? Coyteous? Kind? So why, afta twelve years, is he still only in chahge of ahtichokes at Wahshington Mahket?'

"An' ya know what? *I* don't know what ta *say* ta huh! *If* fit was a matta of money, so I'd buy him a sand-and-gravel company, or a broory. But it's a matta of tra-*di*-tion, gen-tle-men! All of youse got sons. I ain't got no son! All I got is my liddle Philomena. A bee-uty in thuh Hollywood sense a thuh woid she may not be, but she yiz the yimage of huh sainted mother, rest her soul, an' huh husband is like a son ta me, so when ya spit on *him*, gen-tle-men, it's like ya spitting on *me!*"

Throats were cleared, eyes wiped, noses blown. Don Alexander essayed to speak, but was prevented by emotion. At last the silence was broken by Don Swede Swanson. "So let it be Sylvester," he said huskily. There was a chorus of nods.

"Of course, there is one hazard of the chase involved in my sweet Sauncepeur's snaffling hot broils off these outdoor grills," Lord Grue and Groole observed. "It—shall I sweeten the air in here a bit? I've a packet of frankincense that my friend, Osman Ali the Somali, sent me not long ago; I wouldn't *buy* incense, of course," he said, sprinkling the pale yellow grains on the glowing embers. A pungent order filled the cave.

Denny the Dip coughed. The Marquess donned his gauntlet and examined the falcon's talons, par-

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ticularly about the pads. "It makes the poor creature's pettitoes sore. I've experimented with various nostra and it's my considered opinion that Pinaud's Moustache Wax is above all things the best. Is there anything more left in the flask? Shall we kill it, as you say over here? Ah, good show."

With a gesture he motioned to Denny to take the bed; he himself reclined on a tiger skin which was stored during the day in a dry niche. Thus settled, he grew expansive. "Ah, it's not what I've been accustomed to, me that used to have my own shooting lodge in the grouse season, waited on, hand and foot, by a dozen Baloochi servants; well, and now here I am, like a bloody eremite, living on me wits and the $5.60 I get from home each week."

Denny lifted his head. "You're a remittance man?" he inquired.

"Sort of remittance man, you might say, yes. Me nevew, Piers Plunkert, pays me two quid a week, not so much to stay away as to stay alive. 'Avoid alcohol, Uncle,' he writes, 'and mind you wear your wooly muffler when the north wind blows.' It's not filial piety, mind, or avuncular piety, or anything like it. You see, if I pop off, *he* becomes the twelfth Marquess of Grue and Groole, and all the rest of that clobber—the mere thought of it makes his blood run cold. No, he's not a Labour M.P.; his fix is worse than that. He's one of the *Angry Young Men!*

"Struth! Lives in a filthy little room in South Stepney, and composes very bad, very blank verse damning The Establishment, under the pseudonym of 'Alf Huggins.' Well, now, I ask you—would *you* pay any attention to an Angry Young Man named Lord Grue and Groole? No, of course you wouldn't. And neither would anyone else.

"Once a year I threaten suicide. 'It doesn't matter about me, my boy,' I write. '*You* will carry on the name and title.' My word, what a flap that puts him in! *Always* good for ten quid pronto via cablegram."

A sound, so dim and distant that it failed to reach the ear of Denny the Dip, caused the peerless peer to break off discourse and raise his head. "Bogey," he announced. "Policeman, to you. Weighs about a hundred and sixty and has trouble with his left arch. Neglects his tum, too—hear it rumble!"

Denny strained, could hear nothing but the traffic passing through the park, its sound rising and falling with the wind, like surf. He murmured, "What a talent you got, Grooley! What a team we'd make!"

"A team we certainly will *not* make!" the peer snorted. "But, as to your playing squire to my

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knight, hmm, well, we'll consider it. I plan to take a brisk walk in the morning, down to the Battery and vicinage. We'll see if you can stand the pace—no sinecure being gunbearer, as it were, to the man who outwalked The Man-Eater of Mysore. And another thing—" He thwacked The Dip across the feet with his swaggerstick. "No more of this 'Grooley!' Call me Sahib, Bwana, Kyrios, or M'lord."

"Hmm," murmured Lord Grue and Groole, pausing and looking in the shop window. "I find that curious. Don't *you* find that curious, Denny?"

Denny, panting and aching from the long trek down from Central Park, was finding nothing curious but his inability to break away and sink to rest. "Wuzzat, Gr—I mean Bwana?" he moaned. He was bearing, in lieu of gun, the Marquess' swagger stick.

"Use your *eyes*, man! There, in the window. What do you see?"

The Dip wiped the sweat out of his eyes. "Leather goods?" he inquired. "Outboard motors? Canned crabmeat?" The Marquess clicked his tongue, and swore rapidly in Swahili (Up-Country dialect). "Seasoned Honduras mahogany?" The Dip continued hastily. "Flowered organdy? Blue rayon? Manila hemp?"

"*Ahah!* Just so, a great lovely coil of Manila hempen rope. Notice anything odd about it? *No?* You were pulling the wrong mendicant dodge, you should've used a tin cup. You really don't see that scarlet thread running through it, so cleverly and closely intertwined that it cannot be picked out without spoiling the rope? You *do* see it; good. No use to ask if you know what it means; you don't, so I'll tell you. It means that rope was made by and for the Royal Navy. It is *never* sold, so it must have been stolen. No one would dare fence it in Blighty, so they've shipped it over here. Clever, I call that. Must look into this."

He entered the shop, followed by Denny, who sank at once into a chair. The dog Guido, looking as cool and fresh as his master, stood motionless. Mrs. Goodycoonce emerged from the back.

"Afternoon, ma'am," said Lord Grue and Groole, touching the brim of his quasi-caracul cap, and giving her no chance to speak. "My name is Arthur Powisse, of the Powisse Exterminating Company. Allow me to offer you my card—dear me, I seem to have given the last one away; ah, well, it doesn't signify. This is my chief assistant, Mr. Dennis, and the animal is one of our pack of trained Tyrolean Rat Hounds. We have just finished a rush job at one of the neighborhood warehouses, and, happening to

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pass by and being entranced by your very attractive window display, thought we would drop in and offer you an estimate on de-ratting your premises."

Mrs. Goodycoonce opened her mouth, but the Marquess swept on. "I anticipate your next comment, ma'am. You are about to say, 'But I keep a clean house'—and so you do, so you obviously do. But do your *neighbors?* Aye, there's the rub; they don't, alas. Around the corner is an establishment of the type known as, if you will pardon the expression, a common flophouse—the sort of place where they throw fishbones in the corner and never sweep up. Three doors down is the manufactory of Gorman's Glossy Glue Cakes, a purely animal product, on which *ratus ratus* thrives, ma'am, simply *thrives!*"

Something flickered in Granny Goodeycoonce's eyes which seemed to indicate she had long been aware of the proximity of Gorman's Glossy Glue Cakes, particularly on very warm days, and found in it no refreshment of soul whatsoever.

"How often at night," Lord Grue and Groole waxed almost lyrical, "when all should be quiet, must you not have heard Noises, eh?—and attributed them to the settling of the timbers, the expansion and contraction of the joists and beams. Not a bit of it! *Rats!*" His voice sank to a whisper. "Oh, the horror of it! First one gray shadow, then another—"

He took a step forward, she took one backward, he advanced, she retreated. "Then great grisly waves of them, first in the foundations, then in the cellar, then—does this door lead to the cellar? I had better examine it."

Later that evening found the Marquess and his bearer deep in the shadowy doorway of an empty warehouse. "It was the advent of that offensively wholesome-looking young chap, her grandson, that broke the spell," the Marquess mused. "Said she'd consider it. No matter. I saw the cellar. Those crates and crates of Polish hams! Those bales of raw rubber! Turkish Sipahi Cigarettes! That infinite variety of portable, seaborne merchandise!

"It can only mean one thing: the people are pukka river pirates. I know the signs—seen them on the Thames, the Nile, Hoogli, Brahmapootra, Whampoa, Pei-Ho—*eheu fugaces.* Nice setup she's got there—snug shop, tidy house, fine figger, and a widow woman, I'm sure—no sign of a husband and anyone can see she's not the divorcing type. Hmm, well Question is: How does the lad get the stuff there? How do river pirates *usually* get the stuff there? Just so."

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And they had walked along the waterfront, the Marquess examining the water as intently as one of the inhabitants of the Sunda Straits peering for *bêche-de-mer,* The Dip plodding along to the rear of Guido, as sunken beneath the weight of the swagger stick as if it had been an elephant gun. He reflected on the day he might have spent, conning old ladies out of coins, and on a certain bat-cave he knew of, where an ounce and a quarter of Old Cordwainer retailed for the ridiculous sum of 21 cents. But there was that about the Marquess which said *Hither to me, caitiff, and therein fail not, at your peril;* therefore Denny plodded meekly.

"Ho," said His Lordship, stopping, and pointing at the filthy waters of the East River, which, in a happier time, lined with forests and grassy meads, were thick with salmon, shad, cod, alewives, herring, sturgeon, and all fruits of the sea; now the waters were merely thick. "Observe," said His Lordship. "You see how—there—the oil slick, orange peel, bad bananas, and other rubbish floats down with the tide. Whereas the flotsam rides more or less straight out from under us and joins the current at a right angle. The *main* current, that is. Let's have a dekko," he declared, and shinnied down the side of the wharf timbers almost to the water's edge.

His enthusiasm, as he clambered up, almost communicated itself to The Dip. "Whuddaya see, Sahib?" he asked, craning.

"Enough. Tonight, when the eyes of the Blessed Houris in Paradise, yclept 'stars' in our rude Saxon Tongue, shine as clearly as this filthy air will allow them to, we shall follow young Mr. Goodycoonce. Here are rupees, or whatever the juice they c a l l them—'quarters'? Just so. Go thou and eat, and return within the hour. As for me, a strip of biltong will do, and fortunately I took care to refill the flask. They make good whiskey in Belfast, I must say, c u r s e d Orangemen though they be." He raised his drink and waved it across a trickle in the gutter. "To the King over the water"—and drank. His glass eye glittered defiance to all the House o f Hanover.

All was quiet in the kitchen behind THE ALMOST ANYTHING SECOND-HAND GOODS AND OUTLET STORE. Granny Goodeycoonce was pasting in her scrapbook the latest letter she had received in reply to a message of congratulations sent on the birthday of one of the Princesses of the Netherlands. It read, as did all the others in the scrapbook: *The Queen has read your letter with interest and directs me to thank you for your good*

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wishes. And it was signed, as nearly as could be made out, Squiggle Van Squiggle, Secretary.

"Gee," said Neely, looking up from a trade journal he was reading, "here's a bait business for sale on Long Island, on the North Shore." There was no answer. He tried again. "And a boat basin in Connecticut. 'Must be sold at once,' the ad says, 'to settle estate.' Gee."

His grandmother capped the tube of library paste. "I suppose Princess Beatrix will be getting engaged pretty soon," she observed. "I wonder who to. How old is the Crown Prince of Greece? No, that wouldn't do, I suppose; he'll be *King* of Greece some day, and she'll be Queen of Holland. Hmm." She knit her brows, deep in the problems of dynasty.

"They could be combined," Neely suggested.

Granny Goodycoonce looked up, amazed. "What, Greece and *Hol*land?"

"No, I mean a bait business and a boatyard. People," he explained enthusiastically, "would buy *bait to* fish with from their *boats*. And—"

She clicked her tongue. "The idea! A Goodeycoonce becoming a fishmonger!"

"Better than being a river pirate," he mumbled.

"Never let me hear you use that word again!" she snapped. "The very idea! Have you *no* respect for the traditions of the family? Why, it makes my blood boil! And don't you forget for one minute, young man, that I am a Goodycoonce by descent as well as by marriage; don't you forget *that!*"

"Fat chance," Neely muttered.

His grandmother opened her mouth to release a thunderbolt, but at that moment there came a thud from the cellar, followed by a clatter.

"Oh, my land," Granny whispered, a hand at her throat. "Rats! I should've listened to that Limey. Is the door to the cellar locked?"

Answer was superfluous, for at that moment the door swung open and in stepped the Limey himself, more properly described as Arthur Marmaduke Roderick Lodowicke William Rufus de Powisse-Plunkert, Baron Bogle, Earl of Ballypatcoogan, Viscount Penhokey, Laird of Muckle Greet, Master of Snee, 11th Marquess of Grue and Groole in the Peerage of England, and Hereditary Lord High Keeper of the Queen's Bears. "Good evening, all," he said.

Neely went pale. "I knew it!" he cried. "I knew we couldn't go on getting away with it forever, not after almost three hundred years! That exterminator story was just a dodge—he must be from the Harbor Patrol, or the Coast Guard!"

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The Marquess took his swagger stick from the quivering Denny (who had made the underground voyage with his head under his coat, for fear of bats), and smacked it gently into the palm of his hand. "You know, I resent that very much," he said, a touch of petulance in his voice. "I will have you know that I am no copper's nark, common informer, or fink. I—"

"You get out of my house," said Granny Goodeycoonce, "or I'll—"

"Call the police? Oh, I doubt that, my good woman; I doubt that entirely. How would you explain all those cork fenders in the cellar? The copper cable, raw rubber, Turkish Sipahi cigrattes, Polish hams? To say nothing of enough sailcloth to supply a regatta, a ton of tinned caviar, five hundred *oka* of Syrian arrack, twenty canisters of ambergris, several score pods of prime Nepauli musk, and, oh, simply ever so many more goodies—all of which, I have no hesitation in declaring, are the fruits of, I say not 'theft,' but of, shall I say, impermissive acquisition. Eh?"

Granny Goodeycoonce, during the partial inventory, had recovered her aplomb. "Well, you simply couldn't be more wrong," she said, a smile of haughty amusement on her lips. "'Impermissive'? Poo. We have the best permission anyone could ever want. Neely, show this foreign person our permission."

Still pale, and muttering phrases like *I'll be an old man when I get out,* Neely unlocked an antique cabinet in one corner of the room and removed a flat steel case, which he handed to his grandmother. She opened it with a key of her own, and reverently extracted a parchment document festooned with seals, which she displayed to the Marquess with the words: "Look, but don't touch."

He fixed his monocle firmly in his good eye and bent over. After a while he straightened up. "Mph. Well, I must confess that my knowledge of Seventeenth Century Dutch orthography is rather limited. But I *can* make out the name of Van Goedikoentse, as well as that of Petrus Stuyvesant. Perhaps you would be good enough to explain?"

Nothing could have pleased Granny more. *"This,"* she said in tones both hushed and haughty, "is a Patent from the Dutch West India Company, granting to my great - great - great - great - great great - great - grandfather, Nicolaes Jacobus Van Goedikoentse, *and* 'to his heirs forever,' the right of collecting customs in the harbor port of Nieuw Amsterdam. It was granted in return for Myn Heer Van Goedikoentse's valiant help in resisting the insolent British

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demand for surrender in 1662. Governor Stuyvesant promised he would never forget."

For a moment no word broke the reverent silence. Then, slowly, Lord Grue and Groole removed his cap. "And naturally," he said, "your family has never recognized that surrender. Madam, as an unreconstructed Jacobite, I honor them for it, in your person." He gravely bowed. Equally gravely, Mrs. Goodycoonce made a slight curtsy. "Under no circumstances," he went on, "would I dream of betraying your confidence. As a small effort to amend for the sins of my country's past I offer you my collaboration—my very, very *experienced* collaboration, if I do say so."

Three hundred years (almost) of going it alone struggled in Mrs. Goodeycoonce's bosom to say No. At the same time she was plainly impressed with Lord Grue and Groole's offer—to say nothing of his manner. It took her a while to reply. "Well," she said finally, "we'll see."

Don Sylvester FitzPatrick, Second Vice-President of the Mafia (Lower Manhattan Branch), was nervous. The survey was almost finished, and the Grand Council still hadn't made up its mind about blowing up the Brooklyn Navy Yard. In fact, it was even now debating the project in their Chamber, at the window of the anteroom to which Don Sylvester now sat. Elation at being at long last removed from the artichoke detail had gradually given way to uneasiness. Suppose they *d i d* decide to blow it up? Would the United States Government take the same broad view of this as the Dons did? Visions of being hanged from the yardarm of, say, the USS *Missouri,* danced like sugar plums in Sylvester's head.

A flutter from the crates at his foot distracted his attention. In one was a black pigeon, in one was a white. Very soon the mysterious Mr. Tosci would appear with $87,000,000 in plain, sealed wrappers, and be told the Grand Council's decision. Even now the Mafiosi bomb squads were standing by at the ready in Brooklyn. Informed only t h a t morning that police had put the traditional, semiannual wire tap on the Mafiosi phones, the Mafiosi had brought out the traditional, semiannual pigeon post.

"Now, remember," Don Lefty McGonigle had instructed his son-in-law, "d' black boid has d' message *Bombs Away* awready in d' cap-sool fastened to its foot. And d' white boid's got d' message *Everyt'ing Off* inscribed on d' paper in d' cap-sool on *its* foot. Ya got dat?"

"Yeah, Papa," said D o n Sylvester, wiping his face.

"So when ya get d' woid, *Yes,* ya leddout d' *black* pigeon. But

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if ya get d'woid, *No,* den ya leddout d' *white* pigeon. An' nats all dere's to it. Okay?"

"Okay, Papa."

"Om depending on you. Philomena is depending on you. So don't chew be noivous."

"No, Papa," said Don Sylvester.

When Forrance told Daisy that the "Nafia" was awaiting delivery of the first of its new fleet of trucks he was speaking optimistically. The new truck was "new" only in the sense that it was newer than the one it replaced, a 1924 Star, which had to be thawed out with boiling water in cold weather and cranked by hand before it would start, in all weather. The Nafia treasury had suffered a terrible blow when the Cherry Street Mob, in the mid-fifties, took over the distribution of birch beer south of Vesey Street—during the course of which epic struggle Guts had his ears boxed and Blood suffered a sympathetic nasal hemorrhage; as a result, the treasury could only afford to have the single word NAFIA painted on the side panels. Still it was *some*thing.

"Rides like a dream, don't it," Forrance said, as they headed along South Street one bright afternoon.

"No, it don't," said Blood. "It liss."

"Whaddaya mean, 'it liss'?"

"I mean, like it liss ta one side. Look—"

Guts said, "He's right, boss. It *does* liss. Them new gumball machines ain't equally distribitted. They all slide to one side."

Forrance halted the truck with a grinding of gears. "All right," he said resignedly; "then let's take'm all out and put'm back in again, but *evenly* this time."

So the smallest criminal organization in New York got out of its fleet of trucks to unload and reload its gumball machines.

Tosci paused on the deck of the yacht to receive his superior's final instructions. "I have counted the money," he said, "Eighty-six million in negotiable bearer bonds, and one million in cash."

"Very well. Perhaps they will have time to spend it all before we Take Over; perhaps not. I have instructed the Chief Engineer to test the engines in order that we can leave as soon as the decision is made. They *say* the bombs are set for four hours, but who knows if we can believe them?"

As if to confirm his fears, the Chief Engineer at this moment rushed on deck, grease and dismay, in equal parts, showing on his face.

"The engines won't start!" he cried.

"They *must* start!" snapped the Project Supervisor. "Go below

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and see to it!" The Chief, with a shrug, obeyed. The Project Supervisor scowled. "An odd coincidence—if it is a coincidence," he said. "Personally, I have never trusted sailors since the Kronstadt Mutiny." To conceal his nervousness he lifted his binoculars to his eyes, ordering Tosci not to leave the ship for the time being. Scarcely had he looked through the glasses when an exclamation broke through his clenched lips.

"There is a truck on the waterfront," he cried, "with the Mafia's name on it! And three men are lifting something from it. Here—" he thrust the glasses at Tosci—"see what you can make of it."

Tosci gazed in bewilderment. "Those machines," he said. "I've never seen anything like them. I don't understand—why should the Mafia be unloading such strange devices so near our ship?"

Suspicion, never far below the surface of the Project Supervisor's mind, and usually right on top of it, burst into flames. "They must be electronic devices to keep our engines from functioning!" he cried. "They think to leave us stuck here in the direct path of the explosions, thus destroying alien witnesses! Clever, even admirable—but we cannot allow it. Come—" he seized Tosci by the arm holding the portolio in which the bonds and money were—"to the launch! We must see about this!" Together they rushed down the gangway ladder into the boat.

"White pigeon if it's No," Don Sylvester mumbled. "Black pigeon if it's Yes. White, No. Black, Yes. I got it." But he was still nervous. Suppose he fumbled his responsibilities at the crucial moment—*suppose he bungled the job?* For the hundredth time his fingers examined the catches on the cage, lifted one up a fraction of an inch, closed it, then lifted the other—and there was a sudden sound from the cage.

Don Sylvester's startled fingers flew to his mouth. The catch snapped up. The black pigeon hopped out, fluttered to the window sill, cooed again, and—as Sylvester made a frantic lunge for it—spread its wings and flew out. It soared up, up, up, circled once, circled twice, then flew off toward Brooklyn.

Sylvester stared at the air in wordless horror. Then he stared at the door of the Grand Council Chamber. Any moment now, it might open. He tiptoed over and listened.

"I say *no!*" a voice declared.

"And I say *yes!*" declared a second voice.

Helplessly, his eyes roamed the anteroom, fell at length on the telephone. Regardless of possible wiretaps, he quickly and fearfully dialed a number. "Hello?" he

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whispered hoarsely. "Hello, Philomena? Listen, Philomena—"

The black pigeon flapped its way toward Brooklyn with leisurely strokes, thinking deep pigeonic thoughts. Now and then it caught an updraft and coasted effortlessly. It was in no hurry. But, of course, it really was not very far to Brooklyn, as a pigeon flies . . .

"Easy does it—watch my toes, ya dope—down, down."

"Good afternoon, boys," said Daisy. "I just came out to mail a letter to Turkey. Did you know that airmail is ten cents cheaper to the west bank of the Hellespont, because it's in Europe? Oooh—gumballs! Let me see if I have a penny—"

"No, let me see if *I* got one, Miss—no, lem*me* see, Forry—aa, c'*mon*, *I* gotta have one—"

While the three Nafiosi were plunging in their pockets, the yacht's launch drew up to the pier. Out of it came Tosci, the Project Supervisor, and three crewmen. "What are you up to?" Tosci shouted.

"What's it to you?" Forrance countered.

"I order you to remove those machines from this area at once!"

Instantly truculent, Forrance thrust out his jaw. "Nobody orders the Nafia what to do with its machines," he said. "Anyways, not south of Vesey Street," he amended.

"Put them on the truck and see that they are driven away," Tosci instructed a crewman, who began to obey, but was prevented by Blood. The crewman swung, Blood's nose, ever sensitive, began to bleed, and Daisy, aroused, cried, "You let him alone!" and wielded her pocketbook with a will. The crewman staggered. Guts, gauging his distance to a nicety, swung his ponderous belly around and knocked them down.

"Take the girl," shouted the Project Supervisor, in his own language. "She is undoubtedly their moll. We will keep her aboard as a hostage." And while he, Tosci, and one of their men engaged the tiny syndicate in combat, the other two sailors hustled Daisy into the launch, muffling her cries for help.

Mrs. Goodeycoonce, Neely, Denny, Guido, and Lord Grue and Groole were out for a walk. No decision had yet been made on the noble lord's proposal, but nevertheless everyone seemed to be growing somewhat closer. The Marquess was telling about the time that he rescued the Dowager Begum of Oont from the horrid captivity in which she had been placed by her dissolute nephew, the Oonti Ghook. All listened in fascination, except the dog Guido,

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who had heard the story before.

So taken up in his account was the Marquess that he absent-mindedly abstracted from his pocket a particularly foul pipe (which respect for the lady had normally prevented his smoking in her presence), and proceeded to charge it with the notoriously rank tobacco swept up for sale to the inhabitants of the lower-income quarters of Quetta; and struck a match to it. At the first unconsidered whiff Mrs. Goodeycoonce coughed. Then she gagged, then she inhaled with a harsh, gasping breath. And next she turned white, green, and bright red.

Neely was the first to notice. "Granny!" he said. "Granny?" Then, "It must be your pipe—"

The Marquess was overcome with confusion and remorse. "Terribly sorry," he declared. "I'd knock the dottle out, except that's all it *is*, you know—dottle, I mean. I say, Mrs. Goodeycoonce—oh, I *say*."

But Mrs. Goodeycoonce's face had taken on an almost masculine appearance. She rolled up first one fist, loosely, and then the other, placed them in alignment, lifted them to her eyes, and peered out upon the River. And in a gutturally accented and heavy voice quite unlike her usual tones she declared, "Zound der alarm! Beat to qvarters! *Zo, zo, wat den duyvel!*"

The Marquess' eagle-keen eyes followed her glance and immediately observed something very much amiss upon the waters.

"Stap my vitals, if I don't believe a gel is being forced aboard that vessel over there," he said. "Bad show, that. What?"

Instantly the possessing spirit of Peter Stuyvesant vanished and was replaced by that of Mrs. Goodeycoonce. She uttered a cry. "White slavery, that's what it must be! And in broad daylight, too. Oh, the brazen things! What should we do?"

Neely hauled an old-fashioned but quite authentic and brass-bound telescope from his pocket and swung it around. As he focused in and recognized Daisy, struggling desperately while being taken up the gangway, he uttered a hoarse shout of rage.

"'Do'?" he yelled. "We've got to save her! Come on! My boat! Let's *go!*"

The black pigeon passed over City Hall, dallied for a few moments in the currents around the Woolworth Building, and then pressed on in the general direction of Sand Street . . .

As Neely's boat zoomed under the bow of the yacht, the Marquess kicked off his shoes, seized the anchor chain, and swarmed up like a monkey. Neely and Denny were met at the foot of

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the gangway ladder by two crewmen, who shouted, gesticulated, and menaced them with boathooks. But in a moment the boatmen's attention was diverted by a tumult from above. Part of this was caused by Lord Grue and Groole who, darting from one place of concealment to another, called out (in different voices) battle cries in Pathan, Kikuyu, and Demotic Greek; and part of it was caused by the alarm of the crew at being boarded—so they thought—by a host of foes.

While their opponents' attention was thus distracted, Denny and Neely gained the deck where Neely at once knocked down the first sailor he saw. Denny's contribution was more circumspect. Noting an oily rag in a corner he took out a match. In a moment clouds of black smoke arose.

"Fire!" cried the Dip. "Fire! *Fire!*"

Part of the crew promptly swarmed down the ladder into Neely's boat and cast off. The rest jumped over the side and commenced swimming briskly toward the nearer shore.

"Hello!" Neely shouted, stumbling along the passageways, opening doors. "Hello, hello! Where are you?"

A muffled voice called, he burst in, and there was Daisy, gagged and bound, struggling in a chair. Neely cut her loose, removed the gag, and—after only a very slight hesitation, perhaps natural in a shy young man of good family—kissed her repeatedly.

"Well," said Daisy tremulously, as he paused for breath, and then to herself, "I guess he's not such a milksop after all."

On deck Denny the Dip and the Marquess stomped out the smoldering rag, though not, however, in time to avoid having attracted two police boats, a Coast Guard cutter, the Governor's Island ferry, a Hudson River Dayliner, and the New York City Fireboat, *Zophar Mills,* all of which converged on the yacht.

"Thank you, thank you," called out the Marquess, between cupped hands. "We don't require any assistance, the fire is out. You will observe, however, that officers and crew have abandoned the ship, which means that she is now, under maritime law, by right of salvage, the property of myself and my associates, both *in personam* and *in rem.*"

The failure of the engines to start, it was ascertained after a careful scrutiny, was owing to the intrusion of a large waterbug into one of the oil liners; this was soon set right. An attempt of a floating delegate of the Masters, Mates, and Pilots Union to question the Marquess' right to take the helm of the salvaged vessel was quickly terminated by the revelation that he possessed a first-class navigation certificate in

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the Siamese Merchant Marine. The delegate addressed him henceforth as "Captain," and on departing, offered him the use of all the amenities of the Union Hall.

It was while seeing this personage off that Lord Grue and Groole observed a familiar shadow on the deck of the yacht, and, taking off his quasi-caracul and waving it, lured Sauncepeur down from what the poet Pope once so prettily described as "the azure realms of Air."

"She has clutched a quarry," he observed. "Well-footed, my pretty, well-trussed. Let me have pelt, dearie—nay, don't mantle it—there. Good. You shall have new bewits, with bells, and silver varvels to your jesses, with my crest upon them. Hel-lo, *hel*-lo, what have you *done*, you demned vulture? You've taken a carrier pigeon!" He opened the message capsule. "*Bombs Away*," he read. "Rum, very rum. Doubtless the name of a horse, and some poor booby of a bookmaker has taken this means of evading the puritanical Yankee laws dealing with the dissemination of racing intelligence. Hmm, well, not my pidjin. Haw, haw!" he chuckled at the pun. "Denny!" he called.

"Yes, M'Lord?"

The Marquess tossed him the bird. "A pigeon for the pot. See that Sauncepeur gets the head and the humbles; afterwards she's to have a nice little piece of beefsteak, and a bone to break."

That, in a way, concludes the story. The epilogue is brief. Don Lefty McGonigle, though heartbroken at the abrupt and (to him mysterious) disappearance of his son-in-law and daughter, takes some comfort in the frequent picture postcards that Philomena sends him from such places as Tahiti, Puntas Arenas, Bulawayo, and other locales where the Mafia's writ (fearsomely hard on deserters) runneth not. The Nafia (originally organized in 1880 under the full name of the National Federation of Independent Artisans, a "Wide Awake" or Chowder and Marching Society, as part of the presidential campaign of General Winfield Scott Hancock, whose famous declaration that "the tariff is a local issue" insured his defeat by General J. Abram Garfield)—the Nafia still controls all the gumball and Indian nut machines south of Vesey Street; and revels in the publicity resultant from its members' brief incarceration, along with Tosci, the Project Supervisor, and the three crewmen. The Cherry Street Mob would now not *dream* of muscling in on a syndicate whose pictures were in all the papers in connection with a portfolio containing $87,000,000; it is the Mob's belief that the fight was caused by the Nafia's

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attempting to hijack this sum.

Cornelius ("Neely") and Daisy Goodeycoonce have purchased, out of their share of the salvage money, one of the most up-and-coming bait-and-boatyard businesses on Long Island Sound. Granny Goodeycoonce at first was reluctant, but on learning that Daisy's mother was a Van Dyne, of the (originally) Bergen-op-Zoom, Holland, Van Dynes, she extended her blesssings. It remains her view, however, that the family profession of nocturnal customs collecting is merely in abeyance, and will be kept in trust, as it were, for the children.

Granny is, in fact, for the first time in her life, no longer a Goodeycoonce, but Mistress of Snee, Lady of Muckle Greet, Baroness Bogle, Countess Ballypatcoogen, Viscountess Penhokey, Marchioness of Grue and Groole—and, presumably, Lord High Keeperess of the Queen's Bears—although on this last point Debrett's is inclined to be dubious. The fact that the older couple has chosen to go on a prolonged honeymoon with their yacht to the general vicinage of the Sulu Sea where, those in the know report, the opportunities for untaxed commerce (coarsely called "smuggling" by some) between the Philippines, Indonesia, and British North Borneo are simply splendid, is doubtless purely coincidental.

One thread (or at most two) in the gorgeous tapestry we have woven for the instruction of our readers remains as yet untied. This is the question of what happened to Tosci and his Project Supervisor after their release from brief confinement on unpressed charges of assault.

It is unquestionably true that their pictures were in all the papers. It is equally true, and equally unquestionable, that the Mafia frowns on publicity for those connected with its far-flung operations. Rumors that the two men were fitted for concrete spaceshoes and subsequently invited to participate in skindiving operations south of Ambrose Light, no matter how persistent, cannot be confirmed.

A Mr. Alexander Borjia, businessman and art connoisseur, questioned by a Congressional investigating committee, said (or at any rate, read from a prepared statement): "My only information about the so-called Mafia comes from having heard that it is sometimes mentioned in the Sunday supplements of sensation-seeking newspapers. I do not read these myself, being unable to approve of the desecration of the Lord's Day which their publication and distribution necessarily involve. Nor can I subscribe to the emphasis such journals place upon crime and similar sordid subjects, which cannot but have

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an unfortunate effect upon our basically clean-living American youth."

It was at or about this point that Senator S. Robert E. Lee ("Sourbelly Sam") Sorby (D., Old Catawba), chose to light up his famous double-bowl corncob pipe, of which it has been said that the voters of his native state sent him to Washington because they could not stand the smell of it at home. Mr. Borjia (evidently as unimpressed as the Old Catawba voters by Senator Sorby's statement that the mixture was made according to a formula invented by the Indians after whom the State was named)—Mr. Borjia coughed, gagged, gasped, turned white, green, red; and after leveling an imaginary telescope consisting of his own loosely rolled fists, proceeded (in a strange, guttural, and heavily accented voice quite unlike his own) to describe what was even then going on in the secret chambers of the Mafia in such wealth of detail as to make it abundantly clear to the Executive, the Judicial, and the Legislative branches of the Government (as well as to himself, when with bulging eyes he subsequently read the transcripts of his own "confession") that he must never be allowed outside any of the several Federal caravanserais in which he has subsequently and successively been entertained.

And there let us leave him.

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THE JURY BOX

by JOHN DICKSON CARR

Another Detection Club anecdote, if you don't mind. At the club's annual dinner in May of 1938, as already stated, our principal speaker was the barrister, Norman Birkett, K.C., who soon showed that he enjoyed nothing more than to appear for the defenseless and even the indefensible. But that is neither the beginning nor the end of the story.

Being honorary secretary at this time, I had been instructed by the committee to approach Mr. Birkett with a view of getting him there. And I acquired much credit among the brethren when I reported success. Somebody (not myself) started the whisper that I had lured him into our toils by a Machiavellian plot with overtones of blackmail. Though it would delight me to confirm this, nothing of the sort happened. All I did was write to the gentleman, introduce myself, and invite him. He replied, as promptly as courteously, that he had heard of our club and would be happy to accept, his sole stipulation being that we entertain no member of the press.

The first problem arose on the night of the dinner. I had never met Norman Birkett or seen his photograph; neither had anybody else. My wife was posted in the foyer at Grosvenor House to greet the person who in her judgment must be our guest. Now my wife cherished the belief, as I myself did, that any eminent K.C. would be barrel-shaped like Sir Henry Curtis Bennett. After several times accosting the wrong man, she feared lest someone misconstrue her motives and call a cop. Mr. Birkett, who found us instead, proved to be long, lean, red-haired, and very amiable.

He had scarcely commenced his indiscreet speech before I knew with alarm that I should never have guaranteed the absence of the press. True, no reporters had been invited. But each club member could bring as many guests as he liked, supplying only their names for the seating arrangements. At the very next table might lurk some eager beaver from the *Daily Express,* who would plaster counsel's remarks all over page one.

I need not have worried; no disaster ensued. And yet alarm very

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nearly became panic. Following the dinner, still more or less in public, our guest related to some of us the outcome of the celebrated murder trial in which he had successfully defended a notorious wrong 'un whose identity shall not be disclosed here. Let's call him Herbert Rumpus, a name unlike his own. His counsel, using real names, quoted Rumpus's words when the jury brought in their verdict of acquittal.

"Though he was speaking in a hushed whisper," counsel said, "his thunderous incredulity seemed to ring through the courtroom as he blurted out: 'Not guilty, Mr. Birkett? *My God, not guilty?*' "

Like the end of a good detective story, at least it had the merit of being unexpected.

That quality of the unexpected has large place in the various items we shall consider this month. Though there are only three books, the first will be an omnibus containing a trio of good detective novels, the second is galloping mystery-adventure with a neat twist at its finale, the third a collection of real-life oddities ranging from vampirism to buried treasure. In short, here's variety as well as quality; fall to!

In *Archer At Large,* by Ross Macdonald (Knopf, $7.95), we find *The Galton Case, The Chill,* and *Black Money,* all featuring one of the few tough private investigators with whom everybody can sympathize. Unlike the sneering, snarling heroes from Hammett or Chandler, Lew Archer is a decent sort who does not make bad manners the guiding principle of his life.

Ross Macdonald being a writer whose work has improved as he himself has matured, each novel is a genuine detective story as well as a genuine thriller; and Mr. Macdonald has one gift, ingenuity, denied those with whom he is usually compared. If *Black Money* may be the most polished performance among these three, the shock ending of *The Chill,* while perfectly fair, has been spun with such craft as almost to defy detection. Whether Lew Archer pursues a lost heir, a lost bride, or a presumed Frenchman with doubtful antecedents, let his path lie amid the unco' rich through the groves of academe, the ultimate move will be suitably violent and suitably satisfactory. Don't miss a trick; the author never does.

About Leo Martin, protagonist-narrator in *The Amphorae Pirates,* by Lou Cameron (Random House, $4.95), the reader at first learns little except that Martin seems to be a free-lance writer and experienced scuba-diver. Various characters, mostly unlicensed, have been diving in Italian waters not only for amphorae, big earthenware jars

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which can be sold as antiques, but for gold and silver booty from long-sunken ships of Greece or Rome. In head-on collision Martin smacks against one such pirate, the big Hawaiian named Mike Konakai, with his vicious assistant and his Negro mistress.

Martin next encounters rich Dr. Menderes, who has a daughter as handsome as she is broad-minded, a genuine American passport, and a genuine salvage license from the Italian government. In his search for the most ancient of treasure-galleys the doctor already employs a diver, sinister Tancredi, but takes on our well-meaning narrator (is he so well-meaning?) for additional strength. Martin accepts this job with the connivance of big Mike Konakai, who will hijack the treasure once Dr. Menderes has found it. And watching everybody stands suspicious-minded Captain Colonna, Italian Navy, alert for dirty work against his country's interest.

The whole sea boils with underwater dirty work, including assorted murders, before tranquillity can be fished up from wreck. Here we have notable mystery-adventure well supported with clues to its surprise finish. Four stars and three cheers.

Mischief in the Mountains, edited by Walter R. Hard, Jr., and Janet C. Greene (Vermont Life Magazine, $5.95), has been aptly subtitled 'Strange Tales of Vermont and Vermonters,' For Green-Mountain Vermont, believe it or not, has not always bred the thrifty, laconic Yankee of popular legend. If it could produce Calvin Coolidge, it could also produce such flamboyant figures as 'Colonel' Jim Fisk, wildcat financier, and 'Colonel' George Harvey of newspaper and publishing fame. Finally, it could produce the individualists whose doings enliven this book.

They are far from being inhibited. The town of Chester had a gentleman burglar, Clarence Adams, who in true Deacon-Brodie style robbed his neighbors blind until the spring-gun trapped him at Waterman's Mill. Woodstock Green had, or thought they had, a vampire like Dracula. Whatever the truth of the matter, they dug him up to burn his heart in public. And old Mercie Dale so successfully cursed the Hayden family that there are no Haydens left. You would do well to browse through these tales. Not all concern crime; but, as Sherlock Holmes would have said, "there are some very pretty little problems among them." Good!

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$50,000 in small, unmarked bills—and don't call the police . . .

PAYMENT ON DEMAND

by ROBERT EDWARD ECKELS

THE CALL CAME IN OVER THE bank's switchboard, just like any one of a hundred calls in the course of a business day. Betty Compton, the bank's telephone receptionist, put it on hold, buzzed the manager's desk and said, "Call for you on Number Three, Mr. Green"—and put the matter out of her mind. What happened to a call after she had connected it was none of her concern, and it had been impressed on Betty early in her career that it was best not to take an interest in things beyond the immediate scope of her job.

Green switched over from intercom to Line Number Three and said briskly, "Green here." It was his unvarying greeting. He thought the crisp and businesslike tone helped conceal the fact that at 31 he was the youngest and newest branch manager of Fidelity Trust.

"Listen carefully, Mr. Green," a hoarse voice said. "If you want to see your wife again—alive—put $50,000 in a plain brown paper bag and place the bag in the trash can on the corner of Fifth and Charles."

Green's hand tightened around the phone and reflexively he sat up straighter in his chair. "What?" he stammered. Then more firmly: "Who is this?"

"I'm the man who's going to kill your wife," the voice went on in the same hoarse whisper, "unless you do exactly as you're told. Make sure the money's unmarked and in small bills. Nothing over a twenty. Go directly to Fifth and Charles and then return directly to the bank. Don't call the police and don't try to call your wife. It'll be too bad for both of you if you do."

"How—" Green began, but realized he was talking into a dead line. Slowly he lowered the phone and sat with his hand still clutching it while he tried to sort out the welter of his thoughts.

"Mr. Green," Maggie, his secretary, said, "are you all right?"

"What?" Green said. Then the meaning of the girl's words sank in. "Oh. Yes. Yes." He cleared the line on his phone and rapidly

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dialed his home phone number. He noticed with a surprising sense of detachment that his hand was trembling.

If *he* answers, Green told himself, I won't say a word. I'll just hang up and he won't know it's me.

The phone at the far end of the line trilled twice, a third time. Then his wife's voice said, "Hello?"

Green felt his body sag as the tension flowed out of him. "Helen," he began, and then unconsciously parroting his secretary, "are you all right?"

"Am I all right? Of course I'm all right. What—"

"Don't ask any questions," Green said carefully. "Just do as I say. I just received a phone call threatening your life and—"

"You what!"

"Now, whatever you do, don't panic," Green said. As he said it he realized how close to panic he was himself. "Everything's going to be all right. More than likely it's just a crank call or a bluff. But I don't want you to be alone. Go to one of the neighbors and stay there until either I or the police arrive. And phone me as soon as you get there."

"Frank," Helen began.

"Just *do* it," Green said. "Please." He set the phone roughly back in its cradle.

He sat unmoving at his desk, waiting for his wife to call back and feeling the full weight of the passing minutes bearing down on him. When the phone finally rang on his personal outside line, he scooped it up eagerly. "Yes?" he said.

"It's Helen, Frank." His wife's voice was calmer now. "I'm at Louise Brady's. As soon as I hang up we're going into John's study and lock the door behind us."

"Good."

"I love you, Frank," Helen said.

"I love you." Green waited until he heard the line go dead at her end. Then he took a deep breath and dialed the police.

A black and white radio-patrol car was already parked in the bank lot when Detective Lieutenant Williams arrived 15 minutes after Green's call. Williams stopped on his way into the bank to get a quick rundown on what had happened from the single occupant of the police car.

"We got here maybe eight or ten minutes ago," the uniformed officer said. "My partner went inside. I stayed out here to monitor the radio. So far there's nothing to report."

"I see." Williams said. "F.B.I. been notified?"

The uniformed man shrugged. Williams shrugged in return and went inside the bank.

Green was in his office talking

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to the second uniformed officer. He started forward as Lieutenant Williams came in and introduced himself. "My wife?" Green asked anxiously.

"Your wife's okay," Williams said. "There's one prowl car parked in front of your house and a second cruising the neighborhood. Nobody's gonna try anything against those kind of odds."

Green sank back into his chair. "Thank God," he sighed. "I've been a nervous wreck ever since this started."

"I can imagine," Williams said. He sat down in a chair opposite Green. "Now let's see what we can do about catching the guy who caused it all." Actually, Williams knew, there was very little chance of that, but he had to try. "Would you recognize the voice if you heard it again?"

"Yes," Green said. "I'll never forget that voice."

"Fine," Williams said. "Now, think carefully. Did the voice sound familiar? What I mean is, this guy knew your name and that you were married. So maybe it's somebody you know or somebody you met recently."

Green frowned. "No," he said, "I don't think so." He coughed apologetically. "To tell you the truth, Lieutenant," he said, "I paid more attention to what was *said* than to the voice itself. I think you can understand why."

"Yeah," Williams said drily, thinking that there went any chance of a positive identification. "Well," he went on, "it's not likely he'll call back, but if he does, try to keep him talking. The longer you can keep him on the phone, the more chance there is he'll give himself away."

Green nodded and Williams was trying to think of a way to terminate the interview gracefully when the uniformed officer from the patrol car outside stuck his head in the office door. "They want you over at the Woodlawn branch, Lieutenant," the uniformed man said. "The bank manager there just reported getting a phone call threatening his wife's life."

"Not another one?" Williams said.

The officer nodded grimly. "Yeah," he said. "Only this time the manager made the payoff drop before he called us."

When Williams arrived at the Woodlawn branch of Fidelity Trust he was met by a distinguished-looking man who introduced himself as Gerald Beebe, the bank's vice-president in charge of public relations. "I came out from our main office downtown as soon as I heard," Beebe said. "Arnott, our manager here, is pretty well shaken up, and I thought I could help things roll more smoothly."

Williams nodded and the two

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men went into Arnott's office. Arnott looked up at them dumbly as they entered. He was a slight, schoolmasterish man in his late sixties, bald except for a Caesar's wreath of gray hair running around the back of his skull. A uniformed policeman who had been sitting beside him stood up when he recognized Williams.

"This is Lieutenant Williams, Arnott," Beebe said. "From the police. He has some questions he wants to ask you."

"I know you're upset, Mr. Arnott," Williams said. "But if we're going to catch this extortionist I have to know exactly what happened here."

Arnott took off his rimless glasses and rubbed a hand across his face. "There's not much to tell," he said in a quiet, sad voice. "This man called and said he'd kill my wife if I didn't put $50,000 in small, unmarked bills beside the mailbox at the corner of Franklin and Court. I went to the vault, got the money out, and did exactly what he said. Afterwards I went to the nearest phone and called the main office to tell them what I'd done."

"And we called the police immediately," Beebe added.

Williams glanced at the uniformed officer, who said, "There was a black and white car at Franklin and Court within three minutes of Mr. Beebe's call." He shook his head. "Whoever it was must have been Johnny-on-the-spot, because the money was already gone."

Williams turned back to Arnott. "Why didn't you call us or your main office *before* you made the payoff?"

"It all happened so fast," Arnott said. "I just didn't have time to think. I knew it was wrong to take the bank's money that way. But I just couldn't risk Mary being hurt—I just couldn't do it! We've been married over forty years, ever since I began working for the bank." He looked beseechingly from Williams to Beebe. "I don't know how I'd go on living without her. Especially," he added on a falling note, "now that I'm scheduled to retire in six months."

Williams sighed. "Well," he said, "I don't know if this'll make you feel any better now. But there's a strong possibility that your wife was never in any danger. What it looks like is that some guy got the bright idea of calling bank managers to see if he could panic one of them into making a payoff."

Arnott looked stricken and Williams asked a few more questions, more out of routine than out of hope of getting any helpful information. Like Green, Arnott could furnish no clues as to the identity of the caller. Nor could the Woodlawn branch's telephone receptionist; she didn't remember

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the particular call at all.

"Gee," she said when Williams questioned her, "Mr. Arnott gets so *many* calls—"

At that Williams wrapped it up and left, taking the uniformed man with him. After they had gone, Arnott said to Beebe, "I don't know what I'm going to do about repaying the money. My salary hasn't been enough to save very much. And after I retire, all we'll have is our s o c i a l security."

Beebe coughed to hide his obvious embarrassment. "I wouldn't worry about it, Arnott," he said. "Insurance will cover the bank's loss. But—" he c o u g h e d again— "I'm afraid the bonding company will be sure to insist on your immediate dismissal."

When Arnott arrived home two hours early that afternoon, his wife met him at the door. "What happened?" she said anxiously.

"Just what we expected," Arnott said. "They're letting me go now instead of six months from now." He smiled bitterly. "Forty-three years at that bank and not even a gold watch, let alone a pension, to show for it."

"As if you really cared," his wife said chidingly, helping him off with his coat.

Arnott went into the living room and sank into his favorite chair in the corner. "No," he said. "$50,000 will make up for a lot of things. Especially in South America. The one thing I do regret, though, is the anguish I must have caused young Green and his wife." He sighed. "But unless there was somebody to confirm that threatening c a l l s were actually being made, I was bound to come under suspicion. And Green's the most level-headed of the lot. He was the only one I could depend on to check with his wife first and then call the police."

"Well, dear," his wife said, "perhaps when things settle down a bit you can send him an anonymous $1000 to make up for his worrying."

"Yes," Arnott said, "maybe I'll do that. And while I'm at it, maybe I'll drop the bank a note suggesting that they establish a pension plan. I believe that in the long run they'd find it very much to their advantage."

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A change of reading pace: the story of a feud—lowlanders against mountaineers . . . Sheriff Bolton had thought the feud long over—then Barney, the last of the male Tymans, came home and sooner or later he was bound to meet Collie, the last of the male Hookers, still living on the mountain. And if there was another killing, all hell would bust loose in Peaceful Valley . . .

THE TYMANS AND THE HOOKERS

by LEO R. ELLIS

HANK BOLTON HAD BROUGHT the peace to Peaceful Valley. Before the huge man with the slow speech and gentle manner had taken over as Sheriff, the valley had known violence. The lawless era had begun during Prohibition, had endured until Hank Bolton molded and shaped, and by one means and another had turned chaos into order. As Sheriff, Bolton had eliminated moonshining, at least as far as the valley was concerned, and had managed to forge a tenuous peace between the lowlanders and the mountainfolk.

All this had taken time and effort, eighteen years to be exact, and now Hank Bolton felt satisfied to sit back and enjoy the results. He was in the process of enjoying when Mel Vetter entered the Sheriff's office.

The peppery little deputy had the sharp face of a burrowing animal, and spoke with a disrespect for authority that came from long association with the law. Mel Vetter slapped his hat against his leg, jammed it back on his grizzled head, and glared at his boss. "You're in for big trouble, Hank. There's a Tyman in the valley."

Bolton mulled over the name. To his knowledge there was only one Tyman, Widow Tyman, who owned a farm on the far side where the foothills rose up suddenly to become mountains. "A Tyman?" the Sheriff said mildly.

"*Barney* Tyman!" Mel made the first name a pronouncement of doom.

Bolton nodded slowly when he remembered. Of course, Barney Tyman, a kid sent out of the valley years before to live with an aunt—in Nashville, the Sheriff

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believed. "Well, so little Barney has come home. He must be a sizeable lad by now."

"Lad!" the deputy exploded. "Barney Tyman is a man—big as an ox. He graduated from college this year and now he's come back to the valley." Mel leaned across the desk to shake his finger under Bolton's nose. "You should know what that means, Hank."

"It could mean the boy has come home to visit his maw. Barney's been away for over twelve years now—didn't even come back for his paw's funeral as I recollect."

"Barney Tyman ain't back for a visit, dad blame it! He's here to stay, and I reckon you know what that means, Hank."

"I reckon I don't," Bolton said sternly. "And neither do you, Mel. Don't borrow trouble."

"Hushing it up won't solve nothing. Mark my words, you're going to see the Tyman-Hooker feud bust out all over again."

Bolton slumped behind the desk. The Tyman-Hooker feud had never achieved major proportions, but the vendetta had been bitter. Only three men had been killed; but one killing had occurred during Bolton's term of office. Bolton considered that killing a blot on his record; it still rankled.

The feud had actually begun before Bolton's time—when Big Rufus Tyman, Barney's grandfather, had fist-whipped Collie Hooker in front of the Star Emporium. The mountain man had sworn to have his revenge, and when Big Rufus Tyman left town after dark that night, he disappeared on the way home. Plenty of folks accused Collie Hooker of having waylaid an unarmed man, and of having shot him from behind; but since no body was found these charges could not be proved.

Big Rufus Tyman had a married son, Henry. The son bided his time, until a year later Henry Tyman shot down Collie Hooker's boy on a road outside the village. Since the courthouse lay in the valley, and since Collie Hooker's boy had carried a rifle, the court acquitted Henry Tyman on the grounds of self-defense.

Henry's acquittal embittered the mountain people, but Bolton had become Sheriff by then and he labored to prevent a mass uprising. Now only one male member of each clan remained alive—Collie Hooker up in his mountain cabin, and Henry Tyman in the valley. Sheriff Bolton managed to keep the two men apart for over six years, and during this time little Barney had been sent to live with his aunt.

Then one night Henry Tyman stepped outside to investigate a noise. He carried a rifle, but a blast from the darkness cut Barney's father down instantly.

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The killing had left Collie Hooker the lone survivor of the Tyman-Hooker feud. Now Barney Tyman had returned to Peaceful valley . . .

Sheriff Bolton rose from the swivel chair and stretched. "I reckon we'd better drive out to the Tyman place, Mel. I've never met a college graduate."

The farm differed from its neighbors in that the fences needed repair and the fields were more weed-grown since Widow Tyman had let the land out on shares. The house and garden were still well kept.

Bolton and his deputy left the county car at the road and walked to where a small, open sports car stood in front of the farmhouse. A young man sprawled across the front fender, the upper part of his body half hidden under the hood. "Howdy, Barney," Bolton said.

The young man straightened up and wiped his hands on a rag. The Sheriff felt a twinge of remembrance—he had forgotten that Barney had brilliant red hair, the same shade as his grandfather's, Big Rufus Tyman's. Barney was no ox, but he stood broad of shoulder like his grandfather, and he was tall enough to look Bolton squarely in the eye when they shook hands. The young man grinned at the star on Bolton's shirt front. "So you're still the law here. Nothing has changed in Peaceful Valley."

Mel Vetter poked his head around the Sheriff's arm. "Things have changed a lot," he said in a shrill voice. "We understand you mean to stay on here."

Barney nodded. "That's right. I came back with a purpose in mind."

The little deputy bobbed his head eagerly. "Like taking up where your paw left off?"

Barney leaned back on the fender and regarded the two men soberly. "My father did the best he could under the circumstances. He was a farmer, so am I. I've wanted to farm all my life, even when I lived in the city; that's why I majored in agriculture when I went to college." Barney brought his arm around in a broad sweep. "This is good land—the whole valley is fertile. All it needs is some modern, technical know-how to make it the richest farming community in the state."

Bolton shifted his feet. "Folks around here could stand a little prosperity. So could the merchants—they depend on the crops too."

Barney's face relaxed into a grin. "That's my plan, Sheriff. I came back here to bring prosperity to Peaceful Valley."

After the talk with Barney, Bolton drove back in silence. He ignored the fuming deputy beside him until they reached the outskirts of the village. "Barney

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seems to be a nice sort," the Sheriff said mildly.

"Hrrumph."

Bolton looked sideways at Mel. "You still of a mind that Barney came back here to kill Collie Hooker?"

"I didn't expect Barney to come out waving a gun," Mel said peevishly. "The boy's too smart for you, Hank. He's a college graduate. But Barney is Henry Tyman's son, and as long as there's a Hooker alive, Barney ain't going to forget who murdered his paw."

"And as long as there is still a Tyman, Collie Hooker ain't apt to forget either."

"Bah," Mel snapped, "Hooker's an old man. Why Collie must be nigh on to eighty now, and almost blind to boot." Mel lowered the window, shot a stream of tobacco juice out against the wind, and rolled the window up again. "You can forget Collie Hooker."

"Maybe," Bolton said uneasily, and his eyes were worried when he braked the car to a stop in front of the courthouse.

Sheriff Bolton's face wore a deep frown when he entered the office the next afternoon. Mel surrendered the swivel chair and perched on the corner of the desk. "What's wrong?" the deputy asked. "Barney Tyman starting trouble already?"

Bolton sank down with a deep sigh. "Collie Hooker came into town today—with his rifle."

Mel snorted. "The old man should swap his rifle for a scatter gun."

"Collie has cataracts—both eyes," Bolton admitted. "The old man stumbled over a bag of beans when he came into the Star Emporium, but he hopped up again spry as a fox. Collie's temper hasn't improved none with age either; the old boy cussed up a blue fury before I calmed him down."

Mel chuckled gleefully. "Somebody will have to kill that old devil, he's too orn'ry to die a natural death."

Bolton filled his old briar and tamped the tobacco down. He drew a kitchen match across the underside of the desk, then puffed methodically as he applied the flame. "I was supposing on the way back over here," he said when he had the pipe going. "Supposing the only reason Barney Tyman came back here was to farm."

"You're hooting up a holler tree, Hank."

"Barney went to college to study agriculture," Bolton continued doggedly. "That farm out there has belonged to the Tymans for generations. I figure Barney has every right to come back to Peaceful Valley."

"There's folks that figure Barney Tyman has every right to shoot Collie Hooker too."

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Bolton scratched another match and put the flame to the tobacco. "On the other hand we have an old man who holds on to the past. Collie Hooker is bitter, he's vengeful, and he's not apt to take kindly to a male Tyman walking around alive."

"You could worry some if Collie had a decent set of eyes."

"Collie ain't that blind by a long shot. He can see if the light's good enough, and a thatch of red hair in bright sunlight would make a prime target for an old marksman like Collie." The Sheriff gave up and put the pipe back into his pocket. He rose and reached for his hat. "I think I'll have a talk with the young man. Maybe I can convince him to wear a hat."

Bolton returned from his talk, more troubled than when he left. The young man had been polite, but firm.

"I didn't come home to start trouble," Barney had said. "No one is going to shoot me, I've never hurt anybody around here." He had grinned easily as he nodded toward Bolton's star. "You're the law around here, Sheriff. I guess you can handle any trouble that comes up."

"I was the law here when your paw was shot," Bolton said in a worried tone. "I didn't stop that killing."

"That wasn't your fault," Barney said quickly. "The feud was a nasty business, but it is a thing of the past. My mother sent me out of the valley to keep me from becoming involved, and I mean to keep it that way." Barney bit his lower lip thoughtfully. "My father was a part of the feud. He hated Collie Hooker and we both know that he would have killed Hooker eventually, if the old man hadn't shot him first." The young man's face relaxed and he grinned as he rubbed the freckles across his nose. "I guess it just proves that old quotation, Sheriff. 'He who lives by the sword—' "

"Maybe," Bolton said frowning. "But I'd feel a lot better if Collie would carry a sword instead of a rifle. I reckon you don't intend to wear a hat."

"No, Sheriff, that would be an admission that I believed a feud still exists."

Bolton had talked to Barney Tyman, now the only thing left to do was to talk to Collie Hooker. The Sheriff kept putting the trip off, so it was a week later before he drove up into the mountains. His stay up there was short, and Bolton drove back down angry at both himself and the old mountaineer.

"You got what you deserved," Mel hooted when Bolton told him about the trip. "You should have known you can't reason with Collie Hooker no more than you can with a tree stump."

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Bolton felt the little deputy had drawn a pretty true picture. Collie had stood before his cabin, angry, defiant, with his rifle clutched in his hand. A glint of fire pierced the white film that coated the old man's eyes when Bolton mentioned the Tyman name. Collie didn't listen to a word Bolton said after that—the old man only cussed; he damned Big Rufus Tyman for giving him a beating; he condemned Henry Tyman's soul to hell for shooting Collie's son; he swore at the law for acquitting his boy's slayer; and he ended up by blasting the Sheriff for trespassing on his property.

Bolton could still hear the old man cussing as he drove back down the mountain.

While the Sheriff worried, Barney Tyman kept busy from sunup to dark. The young man not only worked his own farm, but he made himself available to his neighbors as well. Barney seemed to be everywhere, and the sight of his bright red hair bobbing across an open field made the Sheriff wince. Reports came into the office on how Barney had analyzed soil, suggested contour plowing, planned an irrigation system, and how he had brought in a new hybrid corn seed that would double the next year's crop.

The farmers hailed Barney Tyman and believed in his promises. This development only brought more worry to Bolton, for the Sheriff realized that if Barney were shot, the valley people would take it as a blow to their personal prosperity. They could well rise up to avenge the killing. Bolton mentioned his dread to Mel Vetter.

"I told you Barney Tyman would bring nothing but trouble," the deputy said with satisfaction. "And if Barney kills Collie Hooker, hell will bust loose in the mountains. Either way you've got open warfare on your hands, Hank. Things are going to be worse off than when you took over as Sheriff."

The swivel chair squeaked as Bolton leaned back and closed his eyes. "We've got one thing going for us," he said thoughtfully. "Barney doesn't carry a gun. Even the mountain people wouldn't back Collie Hooker if he shot down an unarmed man."

The Sheriff didn't mention that Collie Hooker had already shot down one unarmed man. Bolton knew this for a fact, for he had found Big Rufus Tyman's body himself.

Early in the Sheriff's term of office, Bolton had thought of Whiskey Cave. The cave lay halfway up the mountains and was used by the moonshiners to cache their liquor. It seemed a likely spot for a moonshiner to conceal a body he didn't want found. When Bolton entered, Whiskey Cave was no longer used as a

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hiding place for moonshine. He found an outer room, and beyond an archway an inner chamber where a ledge circled an open pit. A pool lay at the bottom of the pit.

Bolton had poked around two days before he found the skeleton, buried on a shelf halfway down the pit. There was no doubt the bones had belonged to Big Rufus Tyman; red hairs clung to bits of scalp and skin. There was also no doubt that Big Rufus Tyman had been shot from behind—the back of the skull was gone.

Bolton had reburied the bones on the shelf and kept silent. But after the last Tyman killing, the Sheriff saw no reason why Big Rufus shouldn't have a decent burial. But when Bolton had returned to Whiskey Cave he found the shelf had broken away. All of it now lay at the bottom of the pool.

Bolton brought his mind back to the present. He still saw no reason to reveal the secret, especially since he had no proof. Only Collie Hooker and I know where the body was hidden, he thought and closed his eyes again . . .

Bolton had come to no conclusion when four days later he saw Barney's open sports car parked in front of the hardware store. The Sheriff walked over and studied a small neat hole punched through the metal of the door. The hole, with the indentation around it, could only have been made by a high-velocity bullet.

Bolton turned slowly and groaned when he saw Barney Tyman coming out of the hardware store. The young man was carrying a new rifle in one hand a box of cartridges in the other.

"You've got something new haven't you?" Bolton said slowly.

The grim-faced young man nodded toward the hole in the car door. "I've got something new there too." Barney put the rifle on the seat. He tossed the box in and faced Bolton. "You were dead-right, Sheriff," he said in a harsh voice. "The law can't take care of me."

Bolton eyed the rifle butt. "You figure you can?"

"I can do more than sit around and hope nothing will happen."

The Sheriff took out his pipe, fingered the bowl, then shoved it back into his pocket. He reached down and pressed his forefinger against the indentation on the car door. "You get this in broad daylight?" he asked.

Barney nodded. "In the middle of the afternoon. It was fired from close range, so I suppose this one was only a warning." Barney strode around the car and paused before he slid in under the wheel. "I'll take care of myself, Sheriff. You can go back now and rest on your laurels."

Bolton watched the car disappear with a feeling of despair.

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He looked back slowly and groaned again when he saw a mountain man lounging against a storefront across the street. The man had been watching, and Bolton knew that by nightfall Collie Hooker would know the lid was off—Barney now carried a gun.

The Sheriff's shoulders slumped as he trudged down the street. He had been able to bring peace to the valley once, but he had been a younger man then. Now all that Bolton had achieved could be wiped away by one embittered, vengeful old man.

Bolton stopped in a doorway to light his pipe. He couldn't denounce Collie Hooker for having murdered Big Rufus Tyman—the proof was gone. The skull with the missing back now lay at the bottom of the pool in Whiskey Cave. The Sheriff's brow creased as he puffed furiously. "I wonder if Collie Hooker ever returned to Whiskey Cave?" he said aloud.

A moment later a new Sheriff Bolton strode toward his office. He intended to order Mel Vetter to report for special duty the first thing the next morning.

The sun had not yet reached the mountaintops, but the valley was already enshrouded in rosy dawn when a sleepy-eyed Mel Vetter approached the county car. The deputy stopped to stare at his boss. "What the devil you doing in that bright red cap, Hank? This ain't deer season."

Bolton waved his deputy into the car and drove out of the village without speaking. When they were a quarter of a mile from the Tyman farm, the Sheriff edged the car into a clump of trees. He climbed out bringing a carbine with him. Bolton checked the gun carefully before he handed it to the deputy.

"I'm going to take a walk, Mel. Give me a hundred yards head start before you follow. Don't shoot—not unless you have to."

Mel opened his mouth, but after a look into Bolton's eyes he snapped it closed again. "I'll be there, Hank."

Bolton started off toward the Tyman farm, and noted with satisfaction that the sports car stood out in the open. He circled the house and headed off in a straight line for the mountains. Sunshine had reached the valley now. Hank Bolton crossed the fields with his head high, with the quick step of a man twenty years younger.

Bolton climbed the last Tyman fence and continued up into the foothills. His pace slowed now—the rise was getting sharp. Soon he swung over to pick up the trail left by the moonshiners when they had run their liquor down through the valley. The trail was overgrown, but it followed the easiest route to the cave. When the trail ended, Bolton scrambled over a flat-rock surface

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and paused in the entrance of Whiskey Cave.

It took a moment for the Sheriff's eyes to become accustomed to the gloom. He could make out the archway that led to the chamber beyond, but Bolton followed the wall around until he reached a niche. He pressed his body inside and took a flashlight from his pocket.

At last a sound came from the outside, a faint scraping noise on the rock. A moment later the thin stooped figure of Collie Hooker appeared in the entrance, backlighted by the sun. The old mountaineer crouched, his rifle at ready position, before he took a few hesitant steps into the gloom. Collie Hooker seemed to gain his bearings, if not his eyesight, for he crossed the room in a gliding shuffle.

The old man reached the far wall and flattened himself against the archway. He held there, as silent as the rocks around him. Finally satisfied, Collie Hooker eased around the arch and slipped into the blackness of the other chamber.

Sheriff Bolton held his breath and counted silently. He had reached five when a man's scream burst through the archway—a long hollow yell that faded and was choked off by a splash.

Bolton slowly let out his breath as the sound died away. "I reckon Collie Hooker never did return to this cave after he buried Big Rufus."

Bolton snapped on the flashlight and crossed to the archway. He stepped through and cautiously moved along the ledge, the light beam held down. The Sheriff stopped at the fourth step, for beyond there was only empty pit. He aimed the beam straight down until it struck the surface of the pool below. Lazy ripples lapped at the sheer rock wall.

"It's fitten." Bolton spoke softly, but his voice rang with a hollow echo in the chamber. "It's fitten the first and the last of the Tyman-Hooker feud should lie in a common grave."

The little deputy waited a hundred yards down the mountainside. "A danged fool stunt," he sputtered. "Collie Hooker picked up your red cap as soon as you left the farm. He could have shot you a dozen times."

Bolton walked on by the deputy. "Collie Hooker had a guilty conscience. When the old man thought he saw Barney headed for the cave, he had to wait and see if his secret would be discovered."

Before Mel could speak, the Sheriff stopped on an outcropping. The valley lay spread out below them. "Looks real peaceful, don't it, Mel. Sometimes I wonder if folks appreciate how much finagling it takes to keep it that way."

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Much has been written, and much more will be written, on how we should spend our leisure time. Are you prepared to retire? How will you pass the hours, the days, the weeks? The method used by the narrator of this story is definitely not recommended . . .

SEASON'S GREETINGS

by HENRY T. PARRY

Dec. 14

Dear Friends:

This year I've decided to write one of those blanket letters that are getting so popular and wish everybody a Merry Christmas and tell them all the news at the same time.

As most of you already know we moved to Florida last February right after Charley retired and we bought a place in Del Sol, just three blocks in from the Coastal Waterway. All on one floor which is new for us. But even though the house was fairly new it must have been lived in by someone who had retired from being the caretaker of a town garbage dump. You know that I had a reputation back in Ridgevale of being a fussy housekeeper. Well, I couldn't stand this place, it was that dirty.

I scrubbed and polished and dusted and scraped and painted and waxed and oiled and everything else for three solid weeks just to get that house to the point where you wouldn't be ashamed to keep pigs in it. During that time we lived on frozen food and soda pop that Charley brought in. Charley said it was one of the most prolonged cleaning fits I had ever had. I told him it was nothing of the kind, just any normal person's desire to have cleanliness and order in their home.

Charley said all right but did I really have to wash out the fireplace chimney as far up as I could reach just to be orderly? I might add that I cleaned a bird's nest out of that chimney Charley was so sarcastic about. Gives you an idea of how dirty this place was when we moved in.

Even though I had gottten the house in some kind of order—not

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to where it ought to be—I kept having the feeling that I hadn't settled down to Florida living yet. Something kept bothering me. There was something out of place and irregular in the way of living down here.

At first I thought it might be the warmer climate or the new breed of insects. Or it might have been the people except I took good care not to have anything to do with the neighbors and I told Charley he'd have to do the same and not pick up with just any old Tom or Dick just because they might have had something in common up North. Then I decided what was bothering me. It was the lot next door.

The lot had about a 100 foot frontage and was about 75 feet deep. It was vacant if you can call anything vacant that was knee-deep in weeds and had a young forest of scrub oak and pine growing in it. I walked through it and, as I suspected, there was trash hidden in the weeds—a couple of tires, a refrigerator, and about a ton of miscellaneous debris.

Charley told me I was crazy walking through the scrub like that because it wasn't very long ago that this area had been undeveloped and everyone said a pocket of rattlers could have been living there since rattlers were common around here. The neighbors had also been dumping garden trash in the lot but I noticed that nobody ever walked very far in from the street to do it so there might have been something to what Charley said about rattlers.

But the untidy lush growth, the junk that I knew was lying hidden in the brush, and the weeds getting higher each week just bothered me so that I knew I was never going to feel settled until I set that lot to rights.

"Charley," I said, "go down to the real estate office and find out who owns that lot and buy it from them."

Well, Charley let on that it might be a good investment at that but didn't I realize that our income was half of what it used to be before he retired?—and so on and so on.

"Charley," I said, "that lot is driving me out of my mind. I will not live another day next to a transplanted section of the Everglades."

So Charley went down to the real estate office and I got out an ax, a rake and some weed spray, and set to work. Even if Charley couldn't buy the lot I was determined to clean it up and bring some order to the place. He got the lot all right but he grumbled about having to pay a thousand dollars more than it was worth but I said it was a good investment and even if it wasn't I was willing to spend a thousand

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dollars just to remove an eyesore from my view.

It's a good thing I'm 15 years younger than Charley or I couldn't have worked the way I did, especially in that hot sun. I would start at seven in the morning and plug away until before I knew it Charley would be standing there telling me lunch was ready. I was so taken up with what I was doing that it used to give me quite a start sometimes to find Charley standing there.

Anyway, I poisoned every bush, weed, leaf, shrub and every other green thing that grew on that lot. Then I went in with my ax and I chopped and grubbed everything out of the ground until Charley said the lot looked like a graveyard where the help has suddenly gone on strike.

Charley came out to get me for lunch one day and as he stepped into the clearing where I was working he jumped.

"Holy smoke! Look at that!"

He pointed down at a snake, a rattler, with its head chopped neatly off and its tail still squirming. I was frightened because I didn't remember even seeing it, let alone chopping its head off but I must have hit it when I was hacking at the roots of a scrub oak. I didn't let on to Charley.

"What's there to get excited about? Back in the country a ways I bet the natives kill them all the time. I told you there wasn't anything to worry about as long as you're careful."

Charley looked at me as though I was off my rocker but he didn't say anything, just got out of there, putting his feet down as carefully as a ballet dancer.

It took me nearly six weeks but I got that lot cleaned up and some grass started in it. It gave me a great deal of satisfaction to see it so neat and clean although the neighbors did give me some strange looks when they would drive by and see me chopping away in the hot sun.

Well, I was all right for a month after that but then the feeling came back of something being out of the normal pattern and routine that I was accustomed to. The house was shined up and the lot was coming along but I still felt that the days were not running as smoothly as they had before we moved down here. Then I realized what it was. It was Charley.

After you have had your house to yourself from eight to six every day for 25 or more years, it's upsetting to have someone hanging around the house all day and getting in your way. I encouraged Charley to try fishing, thinking it would keep him out of the house for long periods but he said the people he met when he tried it just sat around in expensive

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boats with expensive equipment and exchanged nonsensical talk about what fish liked to eat and what they didn't, as if anyone knew. When I suggested golf to Charley he said he'd just as soon hire himself out to the post office and get paid for walking around in the hot sun pushing a cart.

I'd have been glad to see him get a job in the post office or anywhere just to get him out of the house. To see somebody come into your kitchen and tramp with muddy shoes across a floor you have just waxed or to always have to be after someone to move their chair so you can vacuum where they're sitting. Once I asked him when he was going to start on the three volumes of "The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire" as he always intended. He said that he had let it go too long and that now he wouldn't have the patience to start it, let alone finish it. This was just as well because after I suggested it I realized if he took up reading he'd *always* be around the house.

I made the same mistake again when I asked him why he didn't start writing that book he'd been talking about for so many years, especially when he had a drink or two before dinner, the one exposing the company he worked for and telling about the intrigues that went on. He could never decide whether he would call it "Of Rats and Men" or "Phonies I Have Known." He just gave me a sour look and mumbled maybe they weren't such a bad lot after all.

Then when I mentioned that he might go down to Waterfront Park—this was when I had run out of errands to send him on—and talk to some of the retired men who hung around there I thought he would split a vein in his forehead. He said he'd be a so-and-so before he would sit around in the park with a lot of old coots talking about the jobs they had retired from and waiting to die. Just as soon rent a bench in front of the funeral home so he'd be ready when the call came. Might even stretch out on the bench while waiting and really be ready.

I was about at my wit's end to find something that would keep Charley away from home all day when one day here comes Charley home with one of those green and white folders put out by a pump company. He'd picked it up at the garden center—they don't say seed store any more—and it said: "Make your own fountain. Dig a hole. Put in a fiberglass pool. Drop in one of our recirculating pumps and you're in for many hours of quiet pleasure."

"Just what do you think you're going to do with that?" I asked.

"I thought maybe since I have so much time on my hands I might dig up at the back property

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line of the new lot, put in a little pool and one of these little pumps and have a fountain. Or maybe even pile up some rocks and have a waterfall. And instead of one of these fiberglass pools they advertise I thought for the basin part I might make it out of concrete. It would be simple to mix up a batch of cement and sand—"

"Cement and sand! You out of your mind? What is messier than cement? Remember the time we had the plasterer I didn't get the house clean for a month? And digging up the new lot just after I worked like a slave to set it to rights! Charley, I just won't hear of it. You must be getting senile to want to start on a messy project like that. I suppose you'll want to have one of those tin flamingos wading in your pool."

Generally when I put my foot down Charley just sighs and gives in to what's right. This time he didn't say anything, just clamped his mouth shut in that stubborn disappointed way he has and went off. He hadn't given up the idea completely though because when I was straightening up his desk a few days later—and what a mess it was—I found some sketches for the pool. In each one the size of the pool kept getting bigger—first four feet, then six, then eight, and the number of bags of cement and sand he figured he'd need got higher and higher. I tore up the sketches.

Charley brought up the subject just once more.

"About that pool, not only would it be kind of a pretty thing but the birds might come there to drink and we could get some of those bird-watching books and keep a list of the various kinds of birds we identified."

"Charley, you are getting senile. Birds! The dirtiest things there are except maybe dogs. And what do you want to be cluttering up the house with books for? I thought we agreed that when we sold your books before coming down here we weren't going to litter up the new place with a lot of dust-catching books."

Charley left me the next day.

I had driven over to the next town where I heard there was a place you could stock up on cleaning supplies and get a good discount. I was held up coming home because I stopped to watch a demonstration of a new kind of floor waxer and I got into an argument with the man who was showing it.

When I pulled into the driveway I saw Charley at the back property line of the new lot, standing in a hole and shoveling dirt onto a big pile. The hole was already knee-deep. Charley was soaked with sweat and I could see that he probably had been working steadily ever since my back was turned. My neat, orderly lot that I worked on in

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the hot sun was being disfigured by that hole for Charley's pool.

I felt the return of my need to get things clean and orderly again. So I grabbed the shovel from Charley and just as he was about to explain I said: "Shut up. Get out of there and let me get this place cleaned up again."

I pitched into that pile of earth and threw it back into the hole and whacked it down good and hard because I didn't want an ugly mound of raw earth left over. I worked at top speed without paying any attention to how hot it was, the insects, or anything else and almost before I knew it I had that hole refilled, packed down hard and I even reseeded it. It wasn't as neat as before, a raw patch in the new grass, but it was orderly. I was so absorbed in what I was doing I didn't notice when Charley left.

When he didn't show up for dinner that evening I tried to call the marina where he hangs out sometimes but our phone wasn't working. I went to the next house up the street and asked to use the phone but they said it hadn't been working since the morning. Same story at the house beyond that one. Pretty fishy, I thought, that three houses in a row should all have their telephones out of order. They probably didn't want to let me see what sloppy housekeepers they were.

Charley hadn't returned by the time I went to bed. I went early because I was very tired from the strain of restoring order to the lot. When he hadn't come home by the next morning I was quite upset and drove down to report it to the country police, the phone still being out of order. They were helpful and asked like did he carry much money around with him, were any of his clothes missing, and did he have a girl friend (imagine, Charley!).

I answered "No" to all this and they said they would put out a "Missing Persons." They did but they never heard anything from it.

I must close because the lights go out in five minutes. A Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year to everyone.

All the best,
Frieda

P.S.: It seems Charley didn't run out on me after all. The telephone company tested out the buried cable that feeds our block and located a break where Charley had been putting in the pool. When they dug down to repair the cable, they found Charley. Someone had hit him with a shovel.

Nobody believed me when I said I didn't know anything about it. However, it's not so bad here as you might think. Everything is clean and orderly and already I've been put on a cleaning detail. Please write. The address is Florida State Prison, Tallacoola.

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a NEW "Photographer" story by

JAMES HOLDING

After too long an absence Manuel Andradas, The Photographer, returns to EQMM—The Photographer, hired assassin of the Corporation, paid killer of the Big Ones, who is not at all discriminating about his assignments but is semantically fastidious about what they are called. Assassinations? killings?—perish the words! The Photographer's extracurricular activities have only one correct, if not proper, appellative: nullifications.

And now, join The Photographer and meet a remarkable English butler. Even the great Jeeves would have found him a worthy adversary . . .

THE PHOTOGRAPHER AND THE SERVANT PROBLEM

by JAMES HOLDING

WHEN MANUEL ANDRADAS looked at the name which Rodolfo had written on the edge of the menu he said with some surprise, "A North American?"

"An Englishman," said Rodolfo, jerking his shoulders in a shrug. "Even an Englishman in Rio can have enemies."

Manuel tore the menu into small pieces and put them into his pocket. "*Verdadeiro.* But an Englishman could cause international complications."

Rodolfo said, "You are not worrying about international complications, Photographer. Admit it. You are merely trying to boost the price, as always."

"An Englishman presents additional hazards, nevertheless. Foreign citizenship means foreign investigators if anything should go wrong." Manuel sipped *cafezhino.*

"Nothing will go wrong. Besides, this is a nobody. A servant. Not even worth the standard price."

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Manuel sighed. "Five thousand, then?"

Rodolfo nodded. "Half now. Half when you bring us proof."

"Is there a deadline?"

The long upper lip of Rodolfo lifted in a carious smile. "You have just made a *batido* corny joke, Photographer. Do you realize that? No, there is no deadline. On the other hand—" Rodolfo dangled the bait casually—"our client hints that expeditious action may be worth a small bonus."

"Ah," said Manuel with satisfaction. "Tell him to have his bonus ready. I shall be prompt."

Within an hour after leaving Rodolfo on Rua do Ouvidor, discreet research had revealed to Manuel several facts which he considered relevant to his enterprise.

(1) The Englishman's address was also the address of one of Rio's wealthiest men—a certain João Távora, presumably the Englishman's employer.

(2) The fourth and current wife of this Senhor Távora was reputed to be not only a famous beauty but also two score years younger, and infinitely gayer, than her elderly semi-invalid husband.

And (3) Senhor Távora, accompanied by his lovely wife, was at present absent from Rio, attending an important meeting of the Brazilian Gemstone Association in São Paolo.

Armed with these items of information on his camera case, The Photographer proceeded at once to reconnoiter the residence of João Távora on the slopes behind Gavea.

The Távora home proved to be a forbidding pile of butter-colored stone, originally built in the florid style of Dom Pedro II with exaggerated embellishments, but now thoroughly modernized by various glass-and-concrete additions haphazardly joined to the main house. This architectural monstrosity was fortunately hidden from public view by the wooded grounds in which it squatted as awkwardly as a Toltec idol in the midst of a Yucatan jungle.

Manuel slipped unobserved between the stone pillars guarding the entrance to the estate and faded quickly into the woods bordering the driveway. Silently, with great caution, he made a complete circuit of the house, staying within the edge of the trees but out of sight of the house, and observing the mansion carefully through a pair of small but powerful binoculars that he took from his camera case.

During this preliminary reconnaisance he was able to pick out through his glasses three uniformed female servants moving about inside the place, the floor-to-ceiling windows in the modern wings permitting him an excellent

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view into the rooms beyond. He could detect no sign of a male servant, however—no one who could possibly be his quarry. Was the Englishman away from the house, perhaps? Or going about his duties in some basement room hidden from Manuel's binoculars?

Philosophically, The Photographer decided he must bide his time. He would have liked to approach the front door boldly, ring the bell, and when the Englishman (if fortune served) answered the door, to nullify him at once without subterfuge, then depart to collect his fee and bonus. Yet such precipitancy would be folly, Manuel knew. First, he must identify his prey beyond the possibility of any mistake. Then he must cut him out, as it were, from his herd of fellow servants. Only then could he proceed with safety to earn his 5000 cruzeiros—and bonus.

So surveillance was imperative. Manuel accordingly ghosted through the trees to the front of the house where, hunkered down behind the bole of a tree on the periphery of the driveway, he would be able to observe without difficulty any comings and goings that might take place at the house itself and to intercept anyone who passed on the driveway.

Time dragged. The sun rolled westward and began to send its rays slanting between the trees. Intermittently Manuel focused his glasses on the house. No one arrived or departed. No one was any longer visible through the windows. Dinnertime was drawing on and hunger pangs assailed him. With resignation he accepted the fact that it would soon be dark and he must therefore wait until electric lights inside the Távora mansion might mark out the servants' quarters for him and perhaps reveal his Englishman.

As he raised the binoculars to his eyes for one more inspection of the house, now floating like a grotesque wedding cake on the surface of dusk, his vigil was abruptly ended.

He felt two arms like striking snakes whip under his armpits and a pair of unbelievably strong hands clamped on the back of his neck in an unbreakable grip.

He dropped his binoculars as though they were hot, and tensed his neck muscles and biceps with every bit of force he possessed. This automatic resistance, pure reflex, he carried out in utter silence, although the unexpected attack on him made his nerves scream. He had heard nothing, no whisper of warning sound, and his ears were preternaturally sharp; he had smelled nothing and his nose was as keen as a hound's; he had seen nothing, and he had been using field glasses all afternoon. Yet here he was, seemingly powerless in the

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grip of some unknown predator.

Manuel was at first startled, then affronted, then ashamed. For never before in his long career had he been taken unawares like this. Never before had he been thus manhandled. And never before, he thought raggedly, struggling with his still unseen assailant, had he felt muscles as unyielding and cable-strong as these, even in his own over-developed forearms which made the sleeves of his coat bulge.

Curiously, he felt no fear, although he was immediately conscious that the struggle he was waging was a hopeless one. He made one last heroic effort to stand upright and hurl his assailant over his head; then, unsuccessful, he capitulated with what grace he could muster. "I yield!" he gasped, drawing his breath with difficulty, yet retaining a tiny vestige of dignity.

"*Prudente, homem pequeno,*" a voice breathed in his ear. "That is wise of you, little man." The words were in fluent Portuguese, but touched with an unmistakable accent. The pressure on Manuel's neck eased a trifle. "What are you doing here with those binoculars? And who the hell are you?"

"*Perdao,* I find it impossible to talk in this position," said The Photographer. "If you will release me, perhaps we can come to an understanding."

"What, free you to run like a rabbit?" the voice asked, laughing. "Not likely!" One of the iron-strong arms suddenly released its grip and came around his throat from behind to take Manuel in a headlock that straightened him up as though an electric shock had made his body suddenly rigid. "Now," said the voice, "kindly cross your wrists behind you, Senhor, and hold your hands quite still. If you wish to avoid being strangled, that is."

Manuel complied meekly. In a moment he felt a thin strap—the removable carrying strap of his camera bag?—pulled tight and buckled around his crossed wrists. His respect for his adversary grew. Any man who could hold The Photographer helpless with one hand while buckling a strap around his wrists with the other was a man of gifts, decidedly.

"Now, then." Manuel was pushed roughly against the tree trunk which had screened him from the house, and a tall man in immaculate morning clothes appeared before him, smiling. The butler's costume was not even disarranged, Manuel noted with admiration. There was still light enough among the trees to show him that this English servant, for it must be he, was a man of commanding presence, if rather raffish good looks.

"Explain yourself quickly, my small friend," said the

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Englishman, "so that I shall know what to tell the police about you."

Manuel said, "Do not call the police just yet, Senhor, I strongly urge you. It would be a catastrophe. For both of us."

"Both of us?" Manuel saw he had awakened a glint of interest in the Englishman's shadowed eyes with this ploy. "A catastrophe for you, I agree. But why for me?"

"Call the police and you are a dead man, Senhor. Listen to me and I can tell you how to save your life."

The butler whistled. "You do go on, don't you? For a common thief without wit enough to keep his field glasses from flashing in the sun, you have a vivid imagination, I must say."

So that was what had given him away, thought Manuel. He said, "I am no common thief, I assure you."

"What are you then?"

"A professional photographer. Manuel Andradas by name. Perhaps you have seen some of my work in *Rio Illustrated* or *Picture Weekly?*"

The butler shook his head. "Not me. I have better things to do with my leisure hours than read illustrated magazines." He chuckled quietly to himself. "Why is a professional photographer spying on the house of Senhor João Távora? Planning a double spread of color photographs for the next issue, I presume?" There was a world of contempt in his tone.

Manuel said heavily, "I am also a professional assassin, Senhor."

"Well, well. And whom were you hired to kill, little man?"

"You," said Manuel.

The butler was not impressed. He laughed. "I was in your debt for five minutes of exciting action," he said, "and now for five further minutes of entertaining lies."

"I do not lie," Manuel persisted. "Look into my camera case there, if you will."

Idly the butler opened the capacious leather bag and withdrew from it three cameras, one after the other—a Minox, a Polaroid, a Leica—then several filters, a long telephoto lens, and finally, from the very bottom of the bag, four other objects: a sheathed dagger, a silenced revolver, an odd-looking arrangement of powerful coil springs in which was concealed a feathered dart with a poison-smeared point, and a thin flexible wire fitted with handloops at each end.

"Are those the sort of trifles habitually carried by a common thief?" Manuel asked, trying to read the butler's expression in the growing darkness.

"I must admit they are not." The butler's voice now held a thoughtful note. "You were engaged to kill *me,* you say?"

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"Yes. You. An English servant. Walter Robinson."

The butler raised his eyebrows. "You do know my name. But that proves nothing. Many people in Rio do."

"Would they come calling on you with binoculars and lethal weapons when your employers are in São Paolo?" The irony of attempting to convince the butler that he was indeed a murderer did not occur to Manuel.

For a long moment Walter Robinson was silent. Then he said, "Who hired you to kill me?" He asked the question with the air of a man who already knew the answer.

Manuel was not surprised. He knew the answer, too. Senhor João Távora was quite evidently the Corporation's client. He would not be the first elderly jealous husband to arrange to rid himself of a frolicsome young wife's lover. He cleared his throat. "That, of course, I dare not tell you. You can understand why. My own life would be forfeit if I did so. The organization is powerful. One does not betray it with impunity."

"The organization!" Walter Robinson snapped his fingers contemptuously. "It is nothing. But it is true that Quadros himself is tough and formidable." The Englishman paused. "I did not dream he was *this* formidable, however. To commission my murder, merely because I have temporarily neglected to pay my employment fee!"

Manuel's thoughts skittered, trying to make sense of what the butler had said.

The Englishman went on, as though thinking aloud, "I agreed to steal the Ocelot, granted. But is a small delay cause for murder?" He sounded more querulous than frightened.

Manuel said simply, "Then why did you not steal it as agreed?" Although he had never heard of the Ocelot, he was willing to learn.

"I was perfectly satisfied with my salary, and with other—ah—fringe benefits of my job." The man was smiling rather smugly.

"Other fringe benefits?"

"The Senhora has been very kind to me," the butler said, unable to resist the boast. "I hesitated to repay her so shabbily."

"Ah, I understand. Emotional involvement, eh?"

"But I meant to take the Ocelot ultimately, of course. Quadros must know that."

"Evidently he does not. Otherwise I should not be here."

"So it seems." Walter Robinson frowned. "But you haven't carried out *your* assignment, either, have you, little man? So there is still time."

Manuel took the plunge. "You are mistaken, Senhor. After tonight you are a dead man,

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whether you turn me over to the police or not. For Quadros, believe me, will send another and another to do what I have failed to do, until one of them succeeds. Inevitably. Unless—"

"Unless what?" Robinson seemed amused.

"Unless I intercede for you. It is your only chance." Manuel forced earnestness into his voice. "You can lay hands on the Ocelot tonight?"

"Certainly. It is in the Senhora's wall safe."

"And you know the combination?"

"No need to know it with Quadros' training behind me."

Manuel nodded. "Then you must steal it now, immediately. And come with me to present the Ocelot to Quadros tonight. I shall confirm to him that you were on your way to him with the Ocelot when I—ah—intercepted you. And that I concluded he would rather have the Ocelot than a dead butler. No doubt I shall have to return my fee for your nullification, but you could easily reimburse me for that, could you not, once I have established cordial relations between you and Quadros again? It is, after all, but a trifling sum."

The butler laughed. He began to remove his belt. When he pulled it loose from the loops around the waistband of his trousers Manuel said, "What's that for?"

"Insurance, little man. To hold you safely here while I take the Ocelot to Quadros."

Indignantly Manuel said, "But I must go with you!"

The butler smiled and shook his head. "Do you take me for a *louco,* a fool? If receiving the Ocelot tonight will satisfy Quadros as you say, I won't need you to intercede for me." Gently he swung the leather belt in his hand, holding it by the buckle. "Do you think I believe all this twaddle about murdering me? Not for a moment. But I *do* believe Quadros hired you to frighten me into stealing the Ocelot for him at once. It is a rather childish plot. But I assure you it has not frightened me. Yet it *has* served to remind me of my obligation to Quadros. An obligation which I nearly forgot in pursuit of more intimate obligations." Again the complacent chuckle.

Manuel said, "Without me, even the Ocelot will not save you."

"I'll take my chances, little man. And meanwhile I'll leave you here until I find out for sure. Forgive my roughness, please."

As he spoke, the big man stepped forward and lashed a fist to Manuel's jaw. The Photographer fell in a heap, his head whirling, lights before his eyes, on the very edge of unconsciousness. Through a mist of pain he felt his ankles being strapped together with the

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butler's belt, felt himself being turned over while the camera strap binding his wrists was tightened.

Then he was left alone at the base of the tree which had been his lookout post. It was completely dark now.

The Englishman returned to the house through the massive front door, leaving it ajar behind him. At the foot of the staircase in the wide entrance hall he stood quiet for a moment and listened. Faint voices reached him from the kitchen pantry at the rear of the house where the cook and the maids were having their dinner. Satisfied, Walter Robinson mounted in darkness to his own room, took a stethoscope from a small bag under his bed, and made his way silently to the bedroom of his young mistress, Senhora Távora. There he switched on the lights.

The boudoir of the Senhora was frothy with satin and lace, redolent of her expensive scent even in her absence. The butler smiled but wasted no time on memories. He went directly to the far wall, swung back a large abstractionist painting on concealed hinges, and exposed a small wall safe. He put the stethoscope's terminals in his ears, its cup against the safe's door, close to the dial, and then, with closed eyes and intense concentration, he listened to the magnified sounds of shuffling wards and falling tumblers within the lock as he slowly turned the combination knob.

Opening the old-fashioned safe was child's play for Walter Robinson. Yet if the safe had been one of the new type that can be opened only by a previously set combination of pitched musical notes impinging on its recorder, or by the interruption of arranged light beams in a certain sequence, the result would have been the same. For Quadros' grounding had been thorough.

Five minutes went by. With a pleased nod Walter Robinson gave a final twist to the dial and pulled sharply outward. The safe door opened. He reached a hand inside and brought forth the single object that the safe contained—a flat blue jeweler's box perhaps six inches square.

Pressing the catch to open the box, the butler reflected that the Senhora must have taken her other jewels with her to São Paolo, for she had many. But none, surely, so beautiful as the Ocelot which blazed up at him.

Looking at the jewel, the Englishman ceased to wonder that Quadros was so eager to acquire it that he would send a messenger to frighten him into stealing it—or to kill him if he refused.

He spent a dazzled moment admiring it. Twenty large mar-

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quise diamonds, their facets flashing fire, were cunningly joined into a massive necklace to which was attached a four-inch pendant in the likeness of a crouching ocelot, the cat's skin intricately inlaid with yellow diamonds, its spots a sprinkling of tiny smoky topazes, its eyes two cabochon rubies. The Ocelot was a museum piece, almost worthy of Benvenuto Cellini.

A voice from the doorway said, "Very pretty, Englishman."

The butler whirled, snapping the lid of the Ocelot's box shut.

Manuel Andradas was standing just inside the room. His strapless camera case was cradled in his left arm. His dark jacket had been brushed clean of the earth and leaf mold it had gathered in his fall. He looked cool, businesslike, even solemn.

The butler goggled at him. When Manuel saw that in that first moment of shock the Englishman was speechless he said helpfully, "You are wondering how I have performed this miracle, are you not? How I escaped from my leather shackles? You must blame Senhor Quadros for that, I fear. He taught you the technique of opening safes, but not the proper way to search a man."

Walter Robinson fought his surprise. He essayed a laugh. "I'll have to speak to him about that, won't I?"

Manuel held up in his right hand a four-inch sliver of steel, honed to a razor's edge and needle's point. "Had you searched me very *very* carefully, you might have found this, pouched under my belt in the hollow of my back," he said, "conveniently placed within reach of my bound hands. Do you see how simple my miracle was?"

"I do," said the butler, shrugging. "So you will accompany me to Quadros after all, is that it?"

Manuel shook his head. "I fear it is too late for that. I will take the Ocelot, however. Bring it to me."

The big Englishman gathered himself, the Ocelot still in his hand. His eyes were glaring now, not with fear but with fury.

"Come, Englishman," Manuel said maliciously, "why do you hesitate? Remember, I am only a little man. Will you let a little man frighten you?"

The butler growled and took one lunging step toward Manuel. A streak of silver light flashed across the distance between them, and Manuel's throwing knife plunged into the Englishman's throat like the bill of a macaw into a rotten fruit.

After taking several Minox pictures of the dead butler, The Photographer put the Ocelot, case and all, into his pocket and quietly departed, switching off the light in the Senhora's bedroom.

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He found the listing on the following day in the telephone book under *Employment Bureaus:* "Getúlio Quadros—Domestic Servants a Specialty" with offices in Avenida Atlantica behind Copacabana Beach.

Quadros proved to be a gaunt bald man with hooded, colorless eyes, a heavy jaw, and a birthmark the size of a cashew nut on his left cheek. He received Manuel in a lavishly furnished office that shouted of prosperity. He greeted The Photographer courteously and waited for him to state his business.

Manuel was deliberately blunt. "I have it on excellent authority that you are a tough man, Senhor Quadros. Do not try toughness on me."

Taken somewhat aback, Quadros said, still courteously, "That is an odd remark. Would you be good enough to explain it?"

"Gladly. I merely suggest, to save time, that toughness will do you no good today. Because I represent those with whom toughness is useless. An organization known in Brazil as the Big Ones, the Corporation. You may have heard of it."

Quadros slowly leaned back against the leather of his desk chair. "Rumors," he said. "I have heard something of the organization, yes. But only rumors." He licked his lips and failed to look directly at Manuel. "You say you represent the Big Ones?"

"*Sim.* I am a messenger from them."

"To me?" Quadros underlined the pronoun with his voice.

"Yes. I am charged to deliver a warning to you."

"Warning!" Quadros' courtesy was replaced by anger. "Warning about what?"

"Your employment bureau. Its operations are known to us."

"They're known to everyone, for God's sake! I advertise in all the newspapers for that very purpose!"

Manuel's upraised hand halted the flow of angry words. "I meant," he said quietly, "that your *entire* operation is known to us. The part that you do not advertise, as well as the part you do."

At these words Manuel saw something flicker briefly behind Quadros' fox-eyes. They became very guarded. "I don't know what you're talking about."

"Let me state it simply. The Big Ones know that you and your associates train potential criminals in lockpicking, safecracking, burglary, and allied arts, and then find them jobs as house servants with wealthy persons where opportunities to apply these skills abound. The Big Ones also know that instead of the usual employment fee for your placement services, you insist that your clients

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steal valuable objects from their employers—steal them for you."

"Clever, if true," said Quadros, "but definitely untrue. Your Corporation gives me too much credit." He hesitated. "And even if it were true, what possible interest could the Corporation have in it?"

Manuel turned over a hand and shrugged. "Competition, perhaps? The Big Ones like to think they control the growth of prosperous enterprises like yours that are outside the law. And they therefore would like a small percentage of your profits as an earnest of good faith. It is very simple."

"What you mean is, they levy blackmail on the independent operator!"

"We prefer to call it protection," Manuel said. "You are at liberty to call it what you will. In any event, the Big Ones expect your cooperation."

Quadros was belligerent. "I told you I had heard rumors of the Big Ones. Only rumors. And I am certain that the Big Ones, in their turn, have heard only rumors about me. Rumors without basis in fact. False rumors. I swear it. Their information about my employment bureau is a tissue of lies. Tell your Corporation that."

Manuel said, "Does the name Walter Robinson mean anything to you?"

"No. Should it?"

"We think so, yes. Because we believe him to have been one of your trained servants with an assignment to steal a certain bauble from his employer."

"I never heard of him." Quadros was emphatic.

"Nor of a necklace called the Ocelot?"

Quadros' breath hissed faintly as he drew it in. "No."

"A pity," said Manuel, "because in that case we have wasted a warning that was meant expressly for you."

"What warning?"

Manuel drew from an inside pocket a five-by-seven-inch black and white photographic print and handed it across the desk to Quadros. It was a blowup from a tiny Minox negative. It showed, in admirable detail, the head and shoulders of the butler, Walter Robinson, mouth twisted in death, Manuel's throwing knife buried to the hilt in the ruin of his neck.

For a moment Quadros gazed at it, his features stiff with horror. Then he whispered, "This is a warning to *me?*"

"A graphic demonstration of what will certainly happen to you if you prove uncooperative."

Quadros swallowed dryly. His belligerency had suddenly evaporated. "What do you want of me, then?"

"A pittance only. Not enough to cut deeply into your operating capital, yet enough to satisfy the

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Big Ones that you truly appreciate their protection. Shall we say a mere five hundred cruzeiros a month?"

Quadros' colorless eyes showed neither relief nor dismay at the amount. "It will pinch me," he said. "I make no secret of that. But I will do my utmost to cooperate. Will you be sure to tell the Big Ones that?" His voice grew bitter. "And tender them my humble thanks for their flattering interest in my small business."

Manuel rose briskly to his feet. "Of course. Let it be in cash, if you please. Mailed on the first of every month to me at this address." He gave Quadros one of his studio cards and retrieved from the desk top his photograph of Walter Robinson.

Quadros asked a final question. "You mentioned a certain bauble, Senhor. The Ocelot. May one know what disposition has been made of it?"

"Certainly," said Manuel, turning to leave. "The Ocelot has been appropriated by the Big Ones as a down payment, shall we say, on the price of their protection. *Bons dias,* Senhor."

Later, Manuel met Rodolfo in the Botanical Garden beside a ditch floored with black and white tiles.

"It is done, Rodolfo," he said. "Promptly enough for the bonus, I think." He handed Rodolfo the same photograph he had shown to Quadros. "Here is the proof. How much is the bonus?"

Rodolfo glanced at the photograph briefly, nodded, and stowed it away. "Five hundred. You shall have it tomorrow if our client is satisfied with this proof."

"Five hundred! Only ten percent!" The Photographer spoke with heat. "It is not enough. Listen to me. This assignment proved unusually dangerous, Rodolfo. I almost lost my life."

Rodolfo was bored. "Always you complain. Always you plead for more money. You are worse than a trade union, a *sindicato,* with your ceaseless demands. You'll be wanting a retirement plan and fringe benefits next."

Manuel lifted his muddy brown eyes to Rodolfo's black ones. "All I want from you is a higher base rate for my work," he said evenly. "The retirement plan and the fringe benefits I can negotiate for myself."

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Is there a new endplay to the identical-twin gambit? Play the game for yourself . . .

MY BROTHER'S KEEPER

by CHARLES EINSTEIN

I HAVE A THEORY THAT WHEN identical twins are born, the one born second must be the one who lacks originality. This, I believe, was certainly true in the case of my brother Joseph and myself. He lacked originality, I think, even in his criminal turn of mind. Thus, when he proposed that we be partners in crime—that one twin would commit the crime and the other would have himself "seen" in another city so as to establish an alibi "proving" that the perpetrator actually must have been somewhere else—all he was doing, in truth, was reacting to a newspaper story he had read back in the 1950's, describing two identical twins who were on the F.B.I's wanted list. They were jewel thieves. One would stick up a store in San Francisco while the other was in Chicago, living a normal and extremely public life.

"It's foolproof, Eddie," Joe said to me.

"It isn't foolproof, Joe," I said to him. "If it was, the F.B.I wouldn't know about it."

We looked alike, we walked alike, we talked alike—but we thought quite differently. Our only real physical difference was that for some strange reason—again, I believe, the result of my having been born first—Joe's feet were bigger than mine, nearly two sizes larger. This, in my judgment, was a compensation—nature's way, if you like, of giving him more feet to make up for less head.

By "less head" I mean, if you please, less brains. One does not like to talk this way about his own identical twin, but the truth is the truth.

I say these things, too, more in sorrow than anger, for I was not only Joe's brother but his lawyer as well, and when he went to jail for embezzlement, Miss Bates and I were the only visitors he ever had. Miss Bates is my secretary. We used to visit Joe together at the State Prison. Because I was his lawyer we were entitled to visit with him not in the large Visitors' Room, where

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a glass-and-wire barrier separates you from the prisoner, but in the so-called "lawyer's room," which was a private cubicle. This is standard procedure in most prisons, but it fascinated my brother Joe.

"You could slip a knife to me," he suggested.

"I could," I said, "but I won't. All it would result in would be more trouble for you and me."

"So I rot in jail," he said.

"You do not rot in jail," I said. "I'm arranging for your parole."

"Nobody would ever know about the knife," he said. "They're very loose about things around here."

"Less loose than you think," I told him.

"What about Miss Bates coming here?" he said.

"What about her?"

"She signs your signature in the Visitors' Book," he said, "and nobody ever notices."

"What difference does that make?"

"She can imitate your signature close enough to fool them," he said.

"So what?" I said. "She's from my office and she's with me. All she does is sign my name. Imitating my signature doesn't have anything to do with it."

"But she *can*," he said. "Can't you, Miss Bates?"

"Yes," Miss Bates said. "When I was in college I worked in the office of the lieutenant governor, signing his name to letters and proclamations. I am very good at imitating signatures."

"You see?" Joe said to me.

"I do not see," I said.

"What do you need to get away with forgery?" Joe said. "You need somebody who can imitate somebody else's handwriting, With Miss Bates here, we have it ready-made. She can imitate any signature she sees. The three of us together could—"

And he was off again, sitting there in jail, outlining a new career in crime—and one just as unoriginal as the one that had put him behind bars. After a while Fat Louis, the prison guard, rapped on the door and said, "Time's up." I was never so happy to see anyone in my life.

In due course Joe's parole came through. We got him a job in a foundry and turned him toward a gainful life; but always in the back of his mind, I knew, was one of those silly schemes of his, and when he started dating Miss Bates I reacted badly.

"He doesn't want you for yourself," I warned Miss Bates. "He wants you for your penmanship."

"No," she said. "It is a physical thing."

"He wants to make a criminal out of you," I insisted.

"No," she said. "He wants to

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make a fallen woman out of me."

"Has he succeeded?"

"No."

"Well," I said. "He has a job and a car. He is a member of society once again. He's entitled to a sex life, I suppose. But not with you, Miss Bates. I have designs on you myself."

"So I noticed," she said.

"Then why do you keep seeing him?"

"For exactly the opposite reason that you suppose," she said. "In my own way I'm trying to rehabilitate him. Not join him in crime, as you seem to believe."

"But you're not attracted to him?"

"No."

"Then you shouldn't lead him on," I said.

"If you don't want me to I won't," she said.

This conversation, occurring as it did in my bachelor apartment at six o'clock in the morning, was the first inkling I had that Miss Bates was willing to be not just my woman, but my only woman. It was at that precise point that I proposed marriage to her, and she accepted. It was at approximately half a minute past that precise point that I realized how clever a woman can be: by playing up to Joe she had forced a proposal from me, which was exactly what she had wanted.

And the pleasant thing was that I was completely happy about it.

I began to tell her how happy I was. As I did so, the doorbell rang. I went to answer it in my pajamas, and it was Joe standing there.

"Let me in," he said. "I think I did something wrong."

I let him into the living room. "What do you mean, you did something wrong?"

"Violated my parole," he said.

"How?"

"Went out of the state. To Las Vegas. Gambled. Won $2000."

"Oh, for God's sake," I said.

"You'll have to cover up for me," he said.

"Did anybody see you there?"

"I think so. I signed some checks."

"That was smart."

"It occurred to me," he said, "if I could marry Miss Bates—"

"If you could *what*?"

"If I could marry Miss Bates," he said, "then everything might be all right. I could say I won the $2000 as a wedding present. It would be a human-interest thing. The parole people would understand."

"The parole people would not—"

"You don't understand," he said to me. "They'd like the idea I've been keeping company with such a nice girl. It's part of my becoming a good citizen again."

"Ah," I said. "I do understand."

"I knew you would," he said.

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"What I understand," I said, "is that this is another one of your worthless, unoriginal ideas."

"But I love her."

"That's not enough. You'd be better off if you just cool it. Don't tell anybody anything. Maybe you won't be reported. Maybe they won't examine your canceled checks."

"But this way—"

"This way," I said, "all you do is call attention to yourself, and all that will do is make trouble. You know what it means when you violate parole? It's back in the can for good. I'm your lawyer, but I won't be able to help you. This time there's no bail, no trial, not even an arraignment. They just take you, cart you off, slap you back in the cell, and forget you."

He was thinking. "Maybe you're right," he said. "But then, what do I do with the money?"

"The money?"

"The $2000 I won."

"I don't know. Whatever you do, don't spend it. And don't carry it around with you."

"Can I leave it here?"

"I'd rather you didn't."

"But you're my brother," he said.

"I know I'm your brother."

"Besides," he said, "there's the gun."

"The gun?"

He took a pistol out of his pants pocket.

"Where'd you get that?" I said.

"It was one of those things," he said.

Stupid Joe. My twin brother Joe.

"The more I think about it, the more I guess you're right," he said. "I'll have to leave it here. At least for the time being."

"The money?"

"The money and the gun both."

"I don't want them here."

"It won't be a problem," he said. "There must be a place. At least till you think of a better somewhere—"

"No—" I began, but it was too late. He was off into the bedroom, with me following, and there was Miss Bates.

When I got in there, Joe turned and pointed the gun at me.

"Get your pants on," he said. "And a shirt. You and I are going to take a ride in my car."

"Joe," I said. "Calm down."

"This is what I get," he said. "My whole life was wrapped up in this woman."

"It wasn't what you thought," I said. "Miss Bates and I are going to be married."

His jaw tightened. "That makes it worse," he said. "To think. My own brother." He waved the gun. "I mean it. Get dressed. Fast! Don't worry about taking your wallet and your keys. Where you're going, you won't need them."

Once again he had not thought

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things through. It was dangerous for him to leave Miss Bates here alone. Suppose she called the police? But it was nothing I could mention to him, for if I did he'd have taken her along too.

So: "Cool it," I said to Miss Bates, and she knew what I meant. I had talked Joe out of things before, and would again.

Meanwhile, I got into my clothes and went downstairs with him to his car. He drove to an isolated place outside of town where they had once done some steam mining, stopped the car, and again pointed the gun at me.

I said to him, "Give me that thing."

"No," he said. "I'm going to kill you."

"Give me the gun," I said.

"No."

"The gun, Joe!"

All of a sudden a meekness came over him. He realized what he was doing and handed me the gun.

I shot him with it. Six times. To make sure, and also to get rid of all the bullets. Then I took his money, his wallet, his ring, and his watch.

I guess the truth of it was I didn't want him pestering Miss Bates any more. After all, if a woman likes one identical twin, she might also like the other.

Part of the steam mine was an open crater, where they had capped a runaway flow, and into this crater I dumped Joe's body and watched it disappear from view. Then I got back in the car and returned to my place. I would have to abandon the car somewhere else, later in the day.

But they were waiting for me when I drove up—two policemen and the parole officer.

"Hello, Joe," the officer said.

I started to say, "I'm not Joe, I'm Eddie"—but then what would I say next? Here I was in possession of his car, his keys, his wallet, his ring, his money, his watch. And as for Joe himself, I had just finished—

"All right," I said. "I'll go quietly."

"You want to give us the gun and the money, Joe?"

I turned over the gun and the $2000, and I got in the back of the police car.

Halfway to State Prison I said, "Can I make a phone call?"

"To who?"

"My brother."

"No."

"He's also my lawyer."

"That's right," the parole officer said. "Okay. Once we get to the prison you can make that one call."

We got to the prison—I noticed that Fat Louis, the guard, was happy to see me—and they let me go into a booth to make one call.

I called Miss Bates, who was still in my apartment.

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"How did things come out?" she said.

"Joe's back in jail," I said. "They were waiting for him. As for me, I've got to be out of town for a few days. Meanwhile, I want you to go visit Joe on Tuesday—first visitor's day."

"But you won't be with me?"

"No. This time you don't sign me in as his lawyer. Just sign yourself in, and you can see him in the regular Visitors' Room. I'll be back on Thursday."

"All right," she said. "I love you, Eddie."

"I love you, too," I said and hung up.

"Ready, Joe?" Fat Louis called out.

"Ready," I said, and went along with him to my cell.

On Tuesday, Miss Bates came to see me. We viewed each other through the grillework. "My God," she said. "You're not Joe. You're Eddie."

"You're the only person in the world who knows it," I said. "Now, here is what you must do, in addition to keeping your voice down while we talk. Come back on Thursday, sign my name as my lawyer—the way you've always done before. Understand?—you put down *my* signature."

"So I can see you in the private room," she said.

"No," I said. "Just sign the book and mingle with the other visitors. Hang around for ten or fifteen minutes. Then leave. Don't try to see me."

"I don't understand," she said.

"You will," I said. "Meanwhile, trust me and keep your mouth absolutely shut. Officially, I'm out of town on business. This has all been a terrible mistake."

"But —"

"No buts," I said. "Just do what I told you."

She did exactly what I told her. On Thursday morning Fat Louis came and opened the cell door and said, "Joe, your brother Eddie's here to see you. In the lawyer's room."

"Let's go," I said.

I followed him downstairs, and when we got into the little corridor just outside the "lawyer's room," I turned and hit Fat Louis as hard as I have ever hit anybody in my life.

He turned, bleeding from the mouth, and I hit him again. Then he grabbed me and we wrestled. He's a big guy, Fat Louis, and I didn't last long.

"Straight to the Warden with you, Joe," he said.

We went straight to the Warden.

"Joe," the Warden said, "what is this?"

"What this is," I said, "is that I'm not Joe. I'm his lawyer, his brother, his identical twin. My name is Eddie, not Joe."

"He's crazy," Fat Louis said,

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and told the Warden what had happened.

"No," I said. "It wasn't quite that way. What happened was that I went in the lawyer's room and Fat Louis here brought Joe down to see me, and as soon as the door closed, Joe pulled a knife on me."

"Where'd he get the knife?" the Warden said.

"How do I know?" I said. "Why don't you ask Fat Louis here, so he can add something to that crazy story he's already given you about how I suddenly tried to beat him up in the hall? Anyway, Joe forced me to change clothes with h i m — p u t his prisoner's clothes on me—and then left me screaming a n d yelling. Fat Louis came in and of course I struggled with him. Tried to explain what happened. He wouldn't believe me, that's all."

"You mean Joe forced you to switch places with him a n d then—"

"Of course!" I said. "I'm Eddie! Sure, I look like Joe, but if you want to check, check it. Check my fingerprints. Check my signature in the Visitors' Book. Check my shoes, for God's sake! Look at these shoes—two sizes bigger than my feet! How do you think that happened?"

"Then there's been a j a i l break," the Warden said.

"That's your problem," I said.

"And the guard here—"

"Fat Louis?" I said. "He's your problem too. If you want to think my brother had help from the inside, I can't stop you."

To this day I have not told Miss Bates, who is now my wife, the whole story, even though a wife may not testify against her husband. She thinks that I sacrificed myself by going to jail in Joe's place, then employed this clever ruse to get out, all in order to protect my brother. What she does not know is that he was dead at the time.

They found his body the other day. A new gush of steam had pushed it back to the surface of the crater. The body was badly decomposed, but they identified him through his dental charts. I don't know how carefully they're looking for his murderer. They reason, perhaps, that anyone with his record, who could stage a prison break like that just after violating parole, was bound to come to a v i o l e n t end. Unimaginative people often do.

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A supermarket is part of our everyday living—as familiar to us as the neighborhood bank, beauty parlor, hardware store, dress shop, stationery store, all the places we visit on our daily, weekly or monthly rounds. Now, remember what Anthony Boucher once wrote about a certain facet of Cornell Woolrich's talent? Woolrich's stories often dealt with the "everyday-gone-wrong," with the terror that lurks in and around the commonplace . . . Well, step into the Super-Rite Market. You'll recognize the place —you've been there many times . . .

CHECKOUT COUNTER

by JACK LEAVITT

JERRY FRANKS, THE NEWLY appointed manager of the Super-Rite Market, carried on his work with a reluctant attitude he felt unable to change: "Every Customer Is My Enemy." The closest he came to speaking out was his routine head-shaking which meant: "It's hard to do a good job. They all keep getting in the way."

Twenty-seven years old, Jerry was tall, dark-haired, and light-complexioned, with premature worry lines slashed into his high forehead. From his days as a clerk in the produce department to his five months as the assistant manager, before the manager quit for a civil service job, Jerry kept trying to make Super-Rite into a first-class store, a neighborhood gathering place. But how can you run a friendly market, he argued with himself, when you know whom to blame for bad checks, shoplifting, squeezed fruit, nibbled candy, trash in the meat compartment, frozen food on the bread rack, and—three times in the past two years—armed holdups?

Leaning against a beige cash register which was crammed with ten- and twenty-dollar bills besides the extra money kept in another cash drawer under the counter, he waited for the afternoon's difficulties to begin. With two clerks out sick and no one to replace them, Jerry had to man the register for the payroll crowd while also taking charge of the floor.

The holdups were his real

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worry. Only a month ago, in the supermarket across the street, the manager had been shot down for staring too closely at a nervous gunman. A month ago? No, Jerry patted the steel cash register, that's the wrong way to count. Two paydays ago! That's the calendar to go by.

On every first and fifteenth of the month the neighborhood food stores took their chances and cashed their customers' payroll checks. "If we don't," a Super-Rite vice-president had lectured the staff, "we might sell out the milk and bread, but who'd be flush enough for steaks or fresh fruit or specialty foods? We've got to take our chances. It's a favor to the public and profit for us."

"How d'you figure $3.14?" demanded the heavy woman whose order Jerry had just rung up. "The beer's supposed to be on special." She hunched over the checkout counter, sweeping her eyes back and forth between her purchases and the amounts on the cash-register tape.

"Yes, ma'am," Jerry sighed in weary frustration. Four o'clock, and the payroll rush hadn't started yet. He shouldn't have worked that extra shift last night. "The beer's right. See," he pointed to the register tape. "One fourteen, plus two dollars for the frozen juice."

"Two dollars," she huffed. "Forget it. Just give me the beer. I thought the juice was on special, too."

"No, ma'am, that was last week. But it's still a good buy."

"Don't you try to fool me," she snapped. "I do my *regular* shopping at Cressway's."

After bagging the woman's purchase while she twice counted her four trading stamps, Jerry rang up No Sale and tucked a correction slip under a packet of fifty-dollar bills. The discarded cans of juice stood on the counter, droplets of moisture beading their silvery tops. In reaching for them he glanced at the large mirror that hung from a ceiling bracket and superintended half the store. Its curved reflection distorted the merchandise counters, twisting them into boomerang shapes, and witched the customers into large-headed ogres with elfin feet. Past the magazine rack, to the right of the gumball machines, darting in and out of sight at the toy counter, a girl about five years old, dressed in yellow sweater and short green skirt, was dancing around. Bandages on both her knees made Jerry wonder what she'd crash into next.

"Little girl," he called to the empty air, "little girl at the toy counter." No one answered.

Wavering between his slowly defrosting juice and his worry over the toys, he locked the register, and walking crabwise

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toward the freezer compartments, he tried to spot the girl as he replaced the cans. Unattended, the register looked b r i g h t — a n d vulnerable. "Never one t h i n g wrong," he grumbled. "Always a dozen."

When he reached the narrow aisle where the toys w e r e displayed, Jerry nearly stumbled over the girl. Her shoulders were quivering with excitement as she reached out with her right hand to fondle, prod, or pinch the harvest of plastic knickknacks. "Little girl," he called. She stiffened, jerking her outstretched hand back to her chest. As she pirouetted to face Jerry he saw an orange bubble pipe in her left hand, with the stem being chewed in her mouth. Fear and hope skirmished in her wide hazel eyes.

Miserable, unsanitary kid, dripping from the nostrils—Jerry winced. She'll never buy the pipe and no one else will take it with teeth marks. All the time, all the time, he insisted to h i m s e l f. Sometimes, at least, he knew the children. He'd approach t h e parent and softly ask, "Didn't your daughter want this bubble pipe she stuck in her mouth at the toy counter? I thought she had your permission to buy it." With this youngster, though, he was working in the dark. He didn't know the girl; he didn't know her parents; he didn't have time to find out who they were. He had to get back to the register and checkout counter.

"Does your mother know what you're doing?" Jerry threw out in cross-examination.

The girl stared at him uncertainly, wondering why grownups were always butting in just when she found whole piles of toys to play with. Sucking on t h e pipe—Mom said she was *much* too old for a pacifier—the girl solemnly nodded her head.

"Well, look," Jerry began to lecture, and paused. His eternal head-twisting to c h e c k on everything in the store brought into range a heavy-set blond man in bleached-out dungarees, waiting impatiently at the r e g i s t e r. "Look," Jerry rushed his words, "you take that pipe right to your mother and tell her the man in the store wants you to pay for it or bring it up to the counter. You tell her you put it in your mouth and bit on it and we'll have to thorw it away if you don't buy it. Understand?"

"How much does it cost? I get ten cents for my allowance," the girl writhed as she bargained, too excited to remain still.

The dungareed man b e g a n fingering the razor blades stacked near the register. Once again Jerry felt himself caught between competing emergencies. "Y'hear me, little girl." He edged away from her. "I'm busy now. You bring me a quarter up there,"—he wav-

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ed in the direction of the register—"and I'll give you change."

Hurrying toward the checkout counter, Jerry swerved to rescue a bag of corn chips that had fallen to the floor. He then grabbed an empty shopping cart which stood abandoned in the aisle and wheeled it along to the front of the store, where dozens of silver carts waited for their payloads. By the time he reached the checkout area the dungareed man had been joined by two teenaged boys who were half pushing, half riding an overloaded cart.

"C'mon, c'mon," Jerry called. "Save it for the playground. You'll break that if you keep climbing on it."

"Right, boss." The first teenager, a red-faced youngster with sharp, protruding ears, tapped his jacket pocket with menacing calm.

"You ain't got nothing there, Chris," his broken-nosed companion grinned.

"I got enough to cut watermelon—and enough left over to take care of beaky guys like you." Hands swinging loosely at his sides, Chris challenged, "Wanna try me?"

"Just hold your horses, fellas, willya?" Jerry broke in. "I'll be with you in a minute. There's someone ahead of you. Yes, sir," he turned to the dungareed man.

Taller and broader than Jerry, the man in dungarees eyed the teenagers with distaste and held tightly onto a brown produce bag. "Tell you what," he hesitated. "Take them first. I, uh, forgot to get, uh, cantelope."

Jerry frowned. "I'm sorry, sir. We don't have any today. There was some trouble with—"

"That's okay," the man shrugged. "I'll look around."

When he started walking toward the bread counter in a large man's stooped, hulking way, Jerry called out, "Fresh fruit's the other direction, sir, in the corner."

"Yeah." The man slashed backward with his hand and slipped into the next aisle crossing his path, vanishing from Jerry's sight except for a shock of blond hair that glided above the top of the pastry shelf.

Into the clear space near the register Chris kicked the overflowing cart. A bottle of club soda spun to the cart rail, trying to leap over and crash to the floor; but it rolled back to safety when Jerry cradled the cart to an easy stop. "They've sure bought enough," Jerry nodded to himself and dug into the jumble of potato chips, mixes, salami, French bread and—wait!—taking up most of the space, two bulky motorcycle helmets.

"Sure hate to lug 'em around." The teenagers reached for their white plastic headgear. "But, hell, gotta live long enough to be able

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to buy our own liquor. Right, boss?"

Jerry put a protective hand on the bag of groceries. "All right, all right. That's three ninety. Got it?"

"You got change for a hundred?" Chris smirked. "Or do you want to put it on the tab?"

"C'mon, now," Jerry argued with a slight tremor in his voice. "I don't have time to fool around."

"That's too bad, boss, you looked like you'd be a lot of fun." Chris slowly rubbed his chin.

"A lot of fun," his partner chorused.

Forehead pulsing, Jerry glared at the two boys. The neck of the soda bottle felt good to his fingers. "You want the food, pay for it. You don't want it, get out."

Chris slammed a half dollar to the counter. "Double or nothing. You call."

"Three ninety. No more talk," Jerry fumed. One tug and the soda bottle would be up in the air, a dangerous club.

"Ol' buddy," Chris said haughtily, looking down his nose at his partner, "you know they'd kick me off the Board of Directors for wastin' my time on a measly little deal like this. Why don't you pay the man?"

The broken-nosed teenager squinted at Jerry. "Tell me again, how much." As Jerry opened his mouth the youngster snarled, "And in a nice way—like to a regular customer."

"That's three dollars and ninety cents you owe me. Cash."

"Please?" the teenager mocked.

"Show me your money," Jerry rocked lightly on his feet. When the boy waved a five-dollar bill like a symphony conductor, Jerry woodenly mumbled, "Please."

"Look at that register!" Chris whistled as Jerry made change. "I'm gonna borrow me an apron and become a big-time grocery clerk."

Slamming the cash drawer so quickly he nicked his finger, Jerry snapped, "Game's over, fellows. Shove off."

"Gotta see more of this place sometime." Chris flicked his eyes back at the register as the boys sauntered toward the front door. "Y' go to a bank, they even got cameras in the Men's Room."

The front door whooshed automatically to let them out. Relieved, Jerry drummed on the countertop with his fingers. Four thirty, his watch said. Four and a half more hours till closing, then double shifts again tomorrow. For what? So in two years they'd give him an uptown store? Great. In two years he could be working for the city or out in the street with a wooden leg. What he ought to do now was get smart. Sit in the refrigeration room for half an hour, catch cold, and start using up his sick leave on the

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company doctor's certificate. Thirty-four days accumulated—

He interrupted himself when he spotted the little girl skipping from the rear of the store back to the toy counter. Still carrying the bubble pipe in her mouth, she seemed cheerfully intent, anxious not to lose a moment's fun. By now he could have had a five-year-old kid, Jerry brooded, if Barbara's folks hadn't shipped her off to Hawaii to break up their engagement. Grocery clerks weren't good enough for her family—so three weeks ago she finished divorcing the second doctor she had married.

"Sorry we kept you, sir," Jerry said, looking up as the man in dungarees stalked forward, using one hand to wheel a half-filled cart over to the checkout counter. In his other hand the blond customer was still carrying the brown paper bag he had been ready to check out a little while ago. "But I see you remembered a few more items, sir. Did you get a look at our cranshaw melons? Lots of customers think they're the best breakfast you can have."

"You gotta nice store," the man remarked.

"We think so. Thanks." Jerry offered his best professional smile, but added a small private glow. It *was* a good place!

The man scanned the aisles converging on the checkout counter. No other customers, no other clerks were visible. "Now clean out your register," he ordered Jerry in a low intense voice. "Fast!"

"You're kidding," Jerry gaped. Standing in the little well between the counter and the register, he felt foolish holding a carton of glazed donuts he had just lifted to begin ringing up the bill. What good were they—forty-nine cents a dozen, made with fresh eggs—to prevent a holdup?

Quickly Jerry whisked his eyes over the cart's other merchandise. Worthless! Nothing hard, nothing heavy, nothing he could use for a weapon. And the store's billy clubs, the only protection the owners would allow, were purposely hidden behind the trash baskets so that sensitive customers wouldn't be insulted by seeing them.

"Look close," the man snapped, and spread open the top of the bag he was carrying. A brown plastic grip and a black metal hammer on a foreign-looking pistol—a 9 mm. P-38—eased into Jerry's sight. The hammer was cocked, ready for firing. Ridiculous! Jerry wasn't alone. Help surrounded him whenever he turned. This was *his* store! Clerks and customers were streaming through the aisles within easy call. They'd lend a hand. They'd step in. One sign from Jerry, one call for help and—he abruptly stopped

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kidding himself—he'd be shot dead. On the firing line everybody would have an excuse. "Sorry, friend, I'm not butting in—not my business."

Jerry fumbled with the register, tapping useless keys and energetically whacking the side. "It's locked," he lied.

"Open it." The man thrust his right hand into the bag, up to a mermaid-tattooed wrist, and leveled his arm in line with Jerry's heart.

Breathing quickly, Jerry rapped the No Sale key with his thumb. The cash drawer banged open and revealed a level field of green. At its sudden stop the paper money quivered slightly, as though a gust of wind had burst through the store. Thousands of dollars rippled and subsided in their small trays, indifferent to whoever claimed them.

"I have a whole dollar," a childish voice announced.

Startled, Jerry whirled toward the sound. Inches above the countertop, but lower than the outthrust pistol, he saw light-brown hair, wide eyes, and a reddened nose. The orange bubble pipe sat firmly in a small tender mouth.

"But my mother says I have to bring the change right back to her," the girl added. She pushed a green plastic jar of Bub-Ble-Blo liquid soap next to the useless carton of donuts. "I can have this, too, my mother said."

The gunman's paper bag swung toward the girl's head, inches away from her ear. "Put the money in a sack," the man ordered.

"Okay," the manager choked, "Okay." With numbed fingers Jerry began scooping out the bills and dropping them into a large red-and-white Super-Rite bag. A few bills spun toward the floor. Jerry reached out, trying to grab them on the wing, missed, and crouched down instinctively to pick them up. An icepick! Lying on the bottom shelf right next to a roll of masking tape. One jab below the ribs with its thin sharp point and—

"Hey," the man barked. "On your feet. Let's go!"

Jerry rose slowly, gripping the ten-dollar bills that had fallen to the floor but thinking of ribs, steel, and blood. He started to put the money back in the open register, blinked in sudden remembrance, and added them to the shopping bag.

"You're taking *too long*," the girl sounded hurt. "My mother said I had to come *right back* with the change. And I want a regular bag, please. Like him." She pushed her wadded-up dollar at Jerry, impatient with grownups who wasted so much time. They weren't supposed to *play* with money.

"Take it and hurry up," ordered the man. When Jerry un-

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folded the bill and dropped it into the shopping bag, the gunman glared at the girl. "You wait here, kid, for the change."

"Let her go, will you? She could get hurt—"

"Not if you're smart!" The man's eyes were bleak, his lips tight. The paper bag in his hand swiveled from Jerry to the child and back again.

For an instant Jerry closed his eyes and held his breath, rehearsing death. It felt empty. The bag of bills hung leadenly from his fingers as he faced up to the man. "Let her go or you'll have to shoot me. And where the hell would that get you?" Over the gunman's left shoulder Jerry could see a wasp attacking the store's front window. If I live, Jerry thought, I'll have to kill it.

"You better put my things in a bag *right now,*" the girl insisted, "or my mom's going to be mad at me."

"She's not going to any mother to make trouble," the man said through a cracked front tooth. "She can damn well—"

Ignoring the holdup man, Jerry grabbed the bubble pipe and plastic jar from the girl's small hand and thrust them into a paper bag from which the pipestem stuck out. Frantically, waiting for the click and the crash—and the void—he slammed the bag on the counter and rasped, "Little girl, get away from here. That way!" He pointed a trembling finger toward the exit, away from the area where the child's mother was shopping. "Wait there for your mother."

"But—" The girl shook her head in bewilderment. She *had* to listen to Mom or she'd be punished again. No television for a whole week.

"You do what a grownup tells you. D'you hear? Go, stupid! Beat it!"

In tears the girl backed off, shaking her head. It wasn't *fair.* How would Mom ever find out she tried to listen and do the right thing? *They* wouldn't tell her.

"Mister," the gunman sneered, "you just made it tougher on yourself. Now, wise up! The money from the other drawer."

Jerry looked puzzled. "What?" he cocked his head.

The man swung his free hand and caught at Jerry's apron and shirt front. One yank and Jerry was off balance, pressed against the counter. His hair swept forward and criss-crossed in front of his eyes, clouding his sight. Using the pistol butt the man smashed Jerry above the ear. *Thunk!* Jerry slumped in pain. His temple erupted with a large white bulge around a bloody gash, and his skull rang with agony.

"The other drawer. And quick!"

Jerry groped for his key and

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clicked open the cash tray under the counter. More bills slid into view. Twenties and fifties. Ripe for plucking. Nothing to save them. No one to help—

"Say, mister. You're not *nice!*" the girl called out.

What was *she* doing here? Green skirt, yellow sweater, high agonized voice! She should've been outside, away from possible bullets. Not here. Not a target! Jerry fought back a sob.

"You were *mean.* You took my things and, oh, you know what you *did?*" the girl whined.

"Get the hell away from here, little girl," Jerry shrieked. "Get the hell away."

Sobbing, confused, hysterical, the child threw her paper bag to the floor and fled to the street. While Jerry stared after her—a tiny figure in a frightening and frightened world—the man struck. He shot his free hand across the counter and snatched the bagful of money. Then he crashed the gun butt against Jerry's face, a direct smash, metal on bone. Blood spurting from both nostrils, Jerry fell back against the register. The man instinctively paused to watch him collapse.

"Ellen," shrilled a voice from the rear. "Ellen!"

Half conscious, Jerry groped awake at the sound. He dropped to the floor, seized the icepick, then staggered erect. Only a few feet, split by the counter, separated him from the waiting thug. "Yaah," Jerry shouted and scrambled onto the counter. The gunman looked shocked, unbelieving, at the sudden fury. His eyes clouded and he leaned backward, thrusting his bagged pistol above his head for a shot at the towering manager.

The man's mouth sliced into a grin, his chipped tooth sparkling, as his pistol pointed at its already bloody target. Jerry swayed on his narrow platform, too weak to care, too angry to be afraid. The man backed up, aimed, and suddenly—noisily—skidded off balance. Arms waving erratically, feet skittering to the side, he toppled to the floor. His blond head smashed into the dark wood like a golden sunburst. The gun bounded out of the paper bag and slid under a cart.

"Help!" shouted Jerry as he leaped to the floor. He scurried to the fallen gunman and shoved the icepick against his neck. "I can't miss," he warned. The man's eyes bulged in terrified belief. Even now, while Jerry's blood dripped along its handle, the steel point made a tiny dent in the man's flesh . . .

"The little kid. That's what upset me," Jerry explained to the police fifteen minutes later in his narrow office. He lay back with wet paper towels blotting up his wounds. "If anything happened to her it would've been my fault.

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I got mad. I don't think I could've jumped a loaded gun otherwise."

"You were lucky," the officer said, looking up from his report sheet. "Those guys usually don't take a header like that." Waving away some cigarette smoke he added, "Crazy lucky."

"Officer, I'm sorry." A neatly dressed brunette moved forward into the doorway. "My little daughter saw the whole thing and she says she *has* to talk to the police. I can't get her to tell me what." From behind the woman's corduroy coat the little girl poked a suspicious head.

"How are you, young lady?" the officer smiled.

Ellen plodded up to him in pigeon-toed shyness.

"Are you a *real* policeman?" she asked.

"Look." He showed her the glistening insignia on his cap. "And here,"—he pointed to the even larger badge on his shirt pocket.

Ellen stared carefully. "You won't let him hurt me, will you?" She pointed at Jerry.

"Why, no. No."

Putting her hand on the back of the officer's chair, Ellen whispered loudly into his ear. "It's really *his* fault." She gestured a second time at Jerry's pale face. "Not the other man's. That other man was just playing, I think. But *he*—" her hazel eyes rolled expressively—"he chased me away. He was *mean*. On purpose. He wouldn't even listen to me when I wanted to tell him what he did. You know what he *did?*"

Notebook open, pencil poised, the officer scratched his cheek. "Maybe you'd better tell me."

"He took my soap-bubble water and he *broke* it! It spilled *all over* the floor. That's why the other man slipped and fell down. It's not fair."

Jerry covered his face with his hands. To be saved that way!

"And I didn't get my change," Ellen pouted. "That's why I couldn't tell Mom. She's going to punish me if I don't get my change."

The officer gently closed his notebook. "Don't worry, little girl." He patted her light-brown hair. "We'll get your change."

"And more bubble water?" she pleaded.

The officer nodded rapidly. Ellen broke into a glorious smile. "Afterwards. *Then* you can arrest him."

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You know what some teen-agers think? That they could literally drop dead and no one would notice.

THEY NEVER EVEN SEE ME

by J. N. WILLIAMSON

MY NAME IS RAYMOND KELNover. I'm 15 years old and I died last night, sometime between 1:00 a.m. (when Johnny Carson went off) and the time I saw that my three brothers had gone to school. It was extremely quiet, like always when we've all gone (including Pop) and Mom's still in bed. I can't really say any closer than that what time it was when I died.

Maybe you wonder (I guess I should have spelled it with a capital Y) how I know it's all quiet after we've left, if I'm gone too. I wouldn't want you to think I'm lying. I don't even know, really, if I'm talking to myself in my mind, but I sure hope you're listening. And it seems awfully important that you get things straight. I think t r u t h sounds more truthful w h e n somebody has got all the details down pat.

So it's that sometimes I'm—and the other guys—sick in bed. Both Pop and Mom are very strict about waking them up. So when we're home we wait till he takes off for work before we slip upstairs and watch cartoons on TV. (Mom whines a lot, for sympathy, when we get her up. With Pop it matters more that we're just quiet.)

Of course, if you k n o w everything you know all this and probably what time I died also. But I'm not like old Louie who takes dumb c h a n c e s with everything and I'll bet would take chances now too. He even used to wake Pop up, Louie did, till after Pop had his gall bladder out and said that it was Louie who caused it. Every time Pop sent the hospital or doctor or something a payment, if Louie was around he'd say l o u d l y, "There's another installment in the real-life story of a self-made jerk."

Don't think (please) that Pop is a very mean fellow who don't care about people's f e e l i n g s. Well, I guess he doesn't, much. But you see, we're Mom's kids first. Pop loved her so much he

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didn't care about us four children with her first husband, but he cares now. Especially with one of his own, who is Joanna. She's in kindergarten now and a darling little girl.

I just tried to get up again and nothing happened again. Since you know I'm dead and all, I don't know how much I'm supposed to tell you. But there doesn't seem to be any way that I can talk out loud, or move, or nothing. Since I sleep on my back, all I can see is the ceiling unless I squinch around, inside some way, and then I can make out Louie's area.

That's what Pop, who hated the Army but learned a lot from it, calls where we sleep in the basement room—our areas. We're each responsible for our own, and since nobody at all remembers about it and Mom's too busy working her part-time job on the main floor of the house to bawl us out any—well, each area's pretty screwed up.

Pardon me. Disorderly, I mean.

Louie's the worst though, like in everything. A real mess.

I wish I could have waked up and been Louie. Instead of whatever it is I am now.

Friday Nite

I scared myself pretty bad, thinking like that about who I am. Even if I'm dead I'm still Raymond Kelnover, 15 years old.

I started wondering when they are going to find me. After school the guys came downstairs and after a while I saw Louie messing around in his area. He asked me if I was sick or something and when I didn't answer him (I tried) he just ate the brown sugar he'd cobbed out of the kitchen and took off again.

The others didn't say anything to me at all. So I have been thinking about how that can be. You'd think a person would look a little bit different, being like dead. But it probably hasn't started changing me yet.

Partly I guess it's my fault anyway. Not being noticed, I mean. Start with Louie who's about two years younger than me. He is tough, really a tough kid, for 13. Back when we were small I had to fight him a whole lot and I never could make him give in. I swear to God—

Pardon. But really you had to practically kill old Lou just to get him to shut up and he never really gave in. I wanted to go ahead and kill him, if you want the truth, all of it. Sometimes I thought he wanted me to do it.

Since I got in the 8th grade and then graduated, though, it was kind of weird what happened. He just understood some way that I couldn't fight him no more. Not till he went to high school too, at least. And then we quit talking altogether.

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Then there's Carter and I don't know how old he is. A tall skinny kid with blue eyes who goes his own way kind of. Maybe you've noticed him? I mean, we're brothers and all but he was always too little for horsing around with. Carter digs cemeteries and poetry.

Ted's the youngest, till Joanna came along. All Ted does is try to be like Louie and sometimes I hit Ted just to wise him up some. But mostly Louie and me both ignore him and he winds up playing with the baby. Joanna. She's in kindergarten and a darling little girl.

Well, now everybody is upstairs eating dinner and there's a lot of noise like always. Pop is trying to get Mom to not work so hard when Louie has her all nervous and Pop's so worried about her health that he's started yelling at her. Mom is being quiet except she just told Carter to eat and now she's bawling out Ted for wetting his bed. "Aren't you just a little too old for that, Ted?" she asks. And Ted stays quiet as usual. This burns both Mom and Pop up, when Ted don't answer. I think Ted knows it.

Joanna says can she go out and play after supper (Mom calls it that, but Pop says "dinner" because he isn't like all the miserable conformists in the neighborhood who may make more money but don't know anything intellectual). Mom says yes, Joanna, you can go out. Pop says no, but because he can't stand either one of them being hurt he just tells her to come in when it's getting dark. We have to watch out for Joanna, all of us, cause she's different than us.

Friday Nite, later

Is this sleeping that I do when I'm gone a while—from everything?

Pardon me, but aren't even you going to notice what's happened to me? Would you sort of look at the records and see if there's anything written down for Raymond Kelnover? That's me. I'm 15. I got blond hair which grows too fast to suit Pop, and my feet are very large for my age, size 11.

They sent Ted down to bed early for getting Joanna's dress dirty and I can hear him over in his area swearing to himself. "Damn Pop damn Pop damn Pop I hate him I hate him I hate ole damn Pop." I guess that sounds sort of terrible to you, with your line of work, but I laughed out loud.

Or thought I did. Ted looked up a second, I think, cause he stopped cursing. Then he took up again where he left off.

I've been figuring out why they didn't ask about me at supper. See, it's Pop's idea that till I'm a junior, at least, I ought to be

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in bed at the regular time. He used to fuss with Mom over it but she would get very very quiet until he thought she was getting sick again. Mom doesn't act like it, yet I think she likes me some. Because she allows me to go and come when I want and says things like, "I trust you, Raymond, and I know that you wouldn't let me down."

Look. Do you keep records on everybody up there?

I was wondering. So, anyways, Pop pretended I wasn't there at all—that he didn't notice I was gone—and Mom figured I had taken off again without telling her where. They'll notice I'm gone, any time now, I hope.

Saturday Morning

Isn't that what you call it, after midnight but way before dawn? I'm back now from wherever it is that I keep going to and they still haven't missed me, so far as I know.

In case you're interested, I've tried to get up and talk again but nothing still happens. I've studied Louie's area until it's almost memorized. Okay, now I'm not looking. There's the bed with the sheet torn off and a hole in it. A gob of his clothes are everywhere, even in my area. But now I can't throw them back. An inner tube, a broken corrugated box with old toys slopping out, two or three of my books, and he's cobbed my good ballpoint pen again, plus I can see the edge of the empty brown sugar box and some other wrappers from stuff he stole and hid under the bed.

I can't see it but there's a real filthy book stuck under his mattress and I keep trying to get him to throw it away before Joanna sees it. She wouldn't understand probably but it wouldn't seem right for such a darling little girl to see such a neat book.

There's more stuff in his area but I'm tired. Will I wake up in Heaven this time?

Saturday Morning (Really. It's about 11:00)

Louie and Ted, Carter and Joanna are watching cartoons upstairs and I remember most of the lines from the Popeye that's on now. So do they. Any time now Pop will wake up and get mad because the set's turned on too loud. Maybe then he'll think about me, since I usually hold it down.

I've just found out that I can sort of read back over what I've been saying to you and I think maybe you felt like I was criticizing Pop or Mom. So let me level with you.

Pop is very very loyal to Mom and he works hard. Mom works hard too and neither one of them drink much or use many dirty words and I don't think they hate

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us at all. Well, I used to think so (with Pop). But then I got to be about as tall as he was and we'd tell jokes and kid each other and stuff. He's okay.

Mom is modern in a lot of ways, she says. She believes that a guy has to have s o m e independence, to learn a sense of responsibility. So she hasn't kissed me since I was about 7 or 8. I can come and go about like I want, or could till I died last Thursday, and I'm pretty sure that I love Mom. She has nice dark hair.

Joanna came down a minute ago and it was pretty awful. I didn't want her to find me, after all. She's just a little girl and wouldn't know what to do with a dead person. (If you want to know I knew it was her by her footsteps. They're a tap-and-a-trip, always about to fall, and she stopped at the foot of the stairs and just stared at me.)

Then this crazy thing happened. She climbed up and leaned over on my bed and there were these beautiful eyes looking down at me. I tried to, you know, close my eyes so she'd think I was asleep and for a minute there I thought I was going away again. But Joanna kind of patted my cheek and then put this thing right under my chin and went away.

For a long time now I been trying to figure out what it is, this thing under my chin. I can't feel anything, not really, and I can't move or pick it up. But now I finally got it. It's a picture she made at kindergarten, one she's been working on the whole semester. There are a lot of colors in it, great crayon work, and these letters "Jo" printed in the corner very very big and important and proud.

She's a darling little girl.

Saturday Night, early

There is no use arguing about it, I'm kind of invisible. Not actually because they can see my body and all. But it's being invisible anyway. Mom c a m e down to go into the utility room and put some junk in the washer and didn't even see me. I almost died.

I mean, I'd have almost died if I was still alive. God, how I wanted Mom to notice—to see that I existed.

But she was busy working. She had her own thing to do.

And I'm not it.

Sunday Morning

My name is Raymond Kelnover and I'm 15 years old and I died Thursday night, between Johnny Carson and school. That's all I know. Every bit of it. Except I'm stuck—really stuck—and that's mainly why I was real scared for a while, just now.

But I just got this great idea. I feel better just thinking about

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it. Look. Next Wednesday is my birthday. I'll be 15 — maybe I stretched it some, at first — and they always have this big cake and Grandma on our birthdays. They'll simply have to notice I'm gone. Besides, school ought to notice tomorrow too. This can't go on much longer. Mr. Frazier, the gym teacher, he'll probably be the first to find out. I was supposed to help him with the frosh basketball team tomorrow.

But even if he don't realize I'm gone Grandma will on Wednesday. Somebody has to open those presents she buys on birthdays, don't they?

Listen, have I told you why Pop doesn't know I'm dead? It's cause he doesn't come down here. He's afraid he might break his neck, the way we don't fulfill our responsibility in the areas and keep things neat.

Louie went to church this morning like he does most Sundays. This absolutely breaks Pop up. "Little Adolf goes to mass," he'll say, doing his imitation of somebody I never heard of. Kind of high and sarcastic-mean sort of. Now Pop's coming downstairs but I don't get my hopes up any. He won't come near me and he wouldn't be able to see me if he did.

"Raymond?"

Pop! I'm here!

"Raymond, where the hell have you gone to this time?"

Nowhere, Pop. Nowhere. I've been here all along, right here.

"Damn kid can always be underfoot when I don't need him but he's never around when I want him for something." He's backing away from the steps. "I've tried to give him everything he wanted, just like all the rest." Pop's talking to himself and hoping Mom hears him. "But just want one miserable thing, just one. Joanna?" His voice is different now. "Joanna, honey? Are you up in your room?" She don't answer. Pop laughs. "Bet she's gone next door to Robin's. What a little darling she is."

Monday Afternoon

I've been gone a long time now and I do not know where and I must still be lost because I am looking at the ceiling again. There are all these white squares, with Kool-Aid and cupcake and dead fly stains as far as the eye can see. It's all spread before me, a world of white squares with these little spots, like an upside-down landing field. And off to the corner of my eye Louie is sitting on the edge of his bed.

"Boy, you are something, Raymond. You know that?"

I tried to ignore him, which of course I did.

"How long you been out of school now? What a soft life. You go and come like you want and nobody asks nothin' of you."

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Then suddenly he gets up and came over to the side of my bed. He has this angel's face, big eyes and kind of just right forehead and ears with a whole bunch of yellowish hair that falls around it. He's a nice looking boy. "Raymond, tell me something."

I don't answer.

"Raymond, just answer me one question." Louie poses like a big deal threat, fists jammed into his sides and head cocked. "Raymond. Are you dead?"

I almost died a g a i n. I *mean—well, you know what* I mean.

"Look, I just want to know. I won't tell, R a y m o n d. I promise."

I glare hard at him, or feel a hard glare at him.

"What I want to know for, is, Raymond, if you are dead then I'm the oldest. Right, Raymond? And if I am shouldn't I be the guy to get all your g i f t s Wednesday?" He paused. "Raymond, if you don't answer me I'll declare you dead."

I don't answer him.

"You're dead," he says.

Wednesday Morning
(getting late)

My name is R a y m o n d Kelnover. I'm 15 today. Grandma came over and they waited a real long time for me. I heard her say finally: "If that's not just like teenagers today. Well, in my day birthdays were something special. You looked forward to them."

No one answered. Then Louie said, "If he ain't here, then I should get his presents. Right? I mean, you can't take 'em all back, right? So can I open 'em now?"

"Certainly not!" Mom says.

"Louis, m'boy, you'd pick the gold right out of his teeth if he dropped dead in front of you," Pop says.

"But he is dead! He really is dead, Pop, so can I have his gifts now?"

There is a lot of silence and I have some hope.

Grandma clears her throat. "Such an imagination. Really, he watches too much TV, that one. I almost believed him."

"Don't worry," Mom s a y s. "We'll see to it that Raymond gets his gifts, Mother."

I hear Mom and Pop get up and start putting packages up on the shelf in the front closet. "Heaven knows when he'll be home to open them," Mom says with a sigh.

"Don't blame me. I've told you before that a boy t a k e s advantage of you when you let him run around free that way."

She doesn't answer Pop at all —not a word.

After a while it got quiet in the house again. I think, maybe, it will stay that way now. Happy Birthday, R a y m o n d Kelnover. Happy Birthday to me.

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DEPARTMENT OF "FIRST STORIES"

This is the 347th "first story" to be published by Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine . . . To the best of our recollection, "The Case of the Dastardly Double" is the first parody-pastiche (the author calls it a "mild parody") of Erle Stanley Gardner and of Perry Mason, Della Street, and Paul Drake ever to appear in EQMM —perhaps even the first Gardner-Mason parody ever to appear in print. In any event, it's a rara avis we don't want you to miss; but bear in mind that "imitation is the sincerest flattery," and parodying, next to pastiching, is the sincerest imitation.

The author, Rod Reed, has been a sort of "ghost writer" for, of all people, O. Henry, and "set a long-distance record for collaboration." Mr. Reed wrote the scripts for "The Cisco Kid" comic strip distributed by King Features Syndicate. From Mr. Reed's home in New York State the scripts went to Buenos Aires, Argentina, where Jose Luis Salinas did the drawings. Although the two collaborated for more than 18 years, they've never met.

While in high school Mr. Reed got a night job as a newspaper copy boy, and has "been involved in world-slinging ventures ever since." He was never able "to crack The Saturday Evening Post, Collier's, Liberty, American, or This Week"—"and where (he asks pointedly) are they *now?" One of his current "ventures" is a regular sports column for the American Armed Forces Features, a supplement that appears with military-post newspapers all over the world.*

In "The Case of the Dastardly Double" you will find the shrewd plotting so essential to a successful parody or pastiche. Mr. Reed knows his source material: he admits he's "an avid Perry Mason follower, ever grateful to Erle Stanley Gardner for many hours of wonderful entertainment, and is president of a one-man club called The Della Street Irregulars". . .

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THE CASE OF THE DASTARDLY DOUBLE

by ROD REED

ATTORNEY TERRY ODDFELLOW stepped briskly through the door to his private office, tossing his hat in the direction of a bust of F. Lee Bailey where it landed at a rakish angle.

His confidential secretary, Bella Boulevard, greeted him with, "Chief, there's a client waiting for you in the outside office. She refuses to go away. Flirty, the switchboard girl, says it's something about a divorce."

"You know I never take that kind of work. Divorce cases are too messy," said the lawyer, who had just won the Case of the Cut-up Corpse. "Go explain that to her, Bella."

"On my way, Chief," said the beautiful secretary who bore a striking resemblance to Barbara Hale of stage, screen, and TV. A few moments later she reported back. "Terry, the woman refuses to tell me why she wants to see you but she swears it isn't a domestic matter. She wouldn't tell me anything but her name which she says is Dove Horse. I can't understand why Flirty thought it was a divorce case. But I don't think you want her for a client. She's too ordinary. And you prefer unusual clients."

"What does she look like?"

"Oh, she's about five foot six, with red hair, limpid eyes, lush lips, and a 36-24-36 figure—just a plain average woman."

"Yes, she does sound run-of-the-mill but sometimes you can learn a lot about a person's character from her clothing. What sort of outfit does she have on?"

"No clues there, Chief. She's not wearing anything."

"No clues, eh? Well, tell her I'm very busy and—"

Just then the door burst open without knocking and a nude girl trotted in, swaying her hips. She exclaimed, "Mr. Oddfellow, I know you don't usually see anybody without an appointment but I hope you can see me."

"Every rule has its exception. I can see you," said the lawyer not unkindly. "But let's get down to brass tacks. What's your problem, young lady?"

"Could I speak to you in private?" whispered the shapely girl, blinking her eyelashes in a coquettish manner.

"Of course. We'll just step into

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the law library," said Terry Oddfellow, putting a fatherly arm about the young lady's waist.

His secretary rose, picked up her pad and pencil, and started to follow, saying, "You'll want me to take notes, won't you, Chief?"

"That won't be necessary, Bella. I think it may be better *not* to have a record of this proceeding," the lawyer replied, his voice charged with meaning.

As the law-library door closed behind them, Bella poured herself a fresh cup of coffee and got out a box of leftover torts. She thought admiringly of her boss's keen intellect and sharp perception. "He's got a mind like a steel trap," she thought. "It's amazing that after only a few words with a client he can decide whether he wants me to take notes or not."

Terry Oddfellow returned from the law library chuckling. "The joke's on us. We took it for granted she was a client but actually she's looking for a job as a confidential secretary. I gave her some dictation to practise on."

Bella's lips trembled. "But, Terry, confidentially you've got a secretary."

"Indeed, and most competent. But it never hurts to have two strings to one's bow. Better go in and see how she's doing."

Bella entered the law library and returned only seconds later, her lips trembling even more, her face ashen, her hands shaking as she pulled the door shut behind her. "She's g-gone," she gasped.

A tall suave man in a double-breasted permanent-press suit burst in from the reception room demanding, "Where is she? Where is she?"

"This is a law office, not an information bureau," said Oddfellow.

"Listen," bellowed the man, advancing menacingly, "when I ask a question I don't expect an impertinent answer from some two-bit shyster. I have reason to believe a young woman in rather—er—unconventional costume came in here and I mean to find her. *Where is she?*"

Vaulting over his desk with surprising agility for a man who only last Thursday had been confined to a wheel chair, the lawyer grabbed the fellow by the collar and the seat of the pants and ushered him into the hall without further ceremony. "And don't come back without a cash retainer," were Terry's parting words.

Returning to his desk the attorney eyed a stack of paper work with distaste. "Well, Bella, I suppose we'll have to buckle down to these routine matters such as riparian rights and *nolo contenderes*, but I sure hate these routine matters and would rather

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be running up and down a hotel fire escape."

"You take too many chances, Chief."

"Perhaps—but without chances life would be humdrum. Well, let's get to work and before you open the mail you'd better wash that red stuff off your hands."

Hastily looking at her pink pinkies the confidential secretary worked up a blush to match, saying, "Gosh, Terry, I didn't realize that new lipstick was so messy." She washed and came back.

"You'll ruin your nails clawing open letters that way," declared the lawyer, not unkindly. "Why don't you use the Indonesian dagger letter-opener?"

"Why, ah, I must have mislaid it," Bella responded in confusion.

"I'll lend you my pocketknife," said the Chief, reaching into his pocket. "Have you ever considered what a story is told by the things a man carries in his pockets? Knife, matches, lighter, cigars, cigarettes, chewing gum, pen, pencil, pennies, pesos, kopeks, kudos, rabbit foot, horseshoe, pipe, pipe wrench—"

His enumeration had only just got rolling when a shrill scream rent the air.

"What was that?" asked the attorney.

"I expect it was only Bertie, the stockroom boy, chasing Flirty, the switchboard girl," said Bella.

"I wonder why he does it?" mused the lawyer.

At that moment the door burst open and Bertie came in carrying the limp form of Flirty.

"Ah, you caught her, I see," deduced Terry Oddfellow.

"Well, it was easy after she fainted," replied the modest youth.

"You shouldn't have made her faint," reproved Bella.

"I didn't. She fainted when she stumbled over the corpse."

"Bella, please ask Saul Chicken of the Chicken Detective Agency to come here. His office is just down the hall."

"Terry, I've been working for you for forty years and so has Saul. Why do you always tell me where his office is?"

"We might have a brand-new reader who would be mystified without that information."

"Aren't mysteries supposed to mystify?"

"Yes, but only on purpose."

Shortly afterward Saul Chicken's code knock was heard and a lanky fellow entered and sat down with his long legs across the arm of a chair and his head on the floor.

Terry said, "Saul, I want you to round up a dozen of your best operatives and put a round-the-clock tail on a corpse."

"Have a heart, Terry. My men are dog-tired. Since you've been

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appearing in four best-sellers a year they haven't had a wink of sleep. Besides, a corpse isn't going to get up and walk out."

"Saul, if you think that, you don't know Erle."

The three moved into the law library where the nude body of Dove Horse lay on the floor, the hilt of an Indonesian dagger letter-opener protruding from her buxom bosom.

"What luck, Bella!" exclaimed the Chief. "We've found our letter-opener."

As the lawyer reached for it the private detective cautioned, "Don't touch that, Terry. It may be evidence."

"Evidence of what?"

"Evidence of murder."

"Good grief, how can you say that? We're not doctors!"

Just then the door burst open and Lieutenant Trigger of Homicide strode into the room. "Aha, we have caught you red-handed this time, Terry Odd-fellow," said he. "Our big, broad, bilious, bumbling District Attorney, Franklin Furter, will throw the book at you!"

"Which book, I wonder?" mused Terry. "Will it be *The Case of the Curious Bride* or *The Case of the Buried Clock* or *The Case of the Brilliant Boll Weevil—*"

"Lieutenant Trigger, you're barking up the wrong tree," cried Bella. "You can't arrest the Chief. I confess. I'm the murderer."

"It's noble of you to try to defend your boss but he can't hide behind a miniskirt," declared the police officer.

"Hey, Lieutenant, there's some writing here on the floor. Looks like the deceased was trying to leave a message," said Sergeant Wholesome, kneeling beside the *corpus delicti*.

Trigger looked down. There in blood was the message: *Bella kilt me.*

The courtroom was crowded to overflowing and there was considerable buzzing before kindly, venomous Judge Pynchem entered and took his place at the bench. The buzzing was supposed to stop when his Honor came in; but it didn't since it was being done by bees who had slipped in through a hole in the screen.

District Attorney Franklin Furter, a barrel-chested, thick-necked individual who gave the impression of having great physical strength and the mentality of a bulldog arose to address the bench. "Your Honor, this is an open-and-shut case. Defendant had opportunity, means, and motive. Her fingerprints are on the murder weapon, the victim's blood was found under her fingernails and on her shoes. The victim left a message accusing her. Besides, she has confessed. There's no need for a trial."

"No need for a trial?" exclaim-

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ed the judge. "Mr. D.A., are you out of your bird? The trial is always the best part!"

"But, your Honor—"

"Don't 'but' me or I'll hold you in contempt of literature. Call your first witness."

The Medical Examiner came on to testify that Dove Horse had not died from eating mushrooms; a ballistics expert proved she hadn't been shot; Lieutenant Trigger, Sergeant Wholesome, and a fingerprint man described their findings. Then the D.A. announced, "And now for my surprise witness."

"It's about time," said the judge, perking up.

A tall suave man in a double-breasted permanent-press suit was sworn in and took the stand. Bella Boulevard leaned over and whispered to her counsel, "Isn't that the man who burst into our office looking for the girl?"

"Yes, or else he's a movie star. He looks like somebody, but I can't think who."

Meanwhile the D.A. was examining the witness. "State your name, please."

"Rocky Horse."

"What was your relationship to the victim?"

"She was my wife."

"When was the last time you saw her alive?"

"When she was entering *his* office."

"Your Honor, may it please the court, let the record show the witness is pointing at defense counsel, Mr. Terry Oddfellow. Now, then, Mr. Horse, what did you do?"

"I went in to ask that two-bit shyster what had become of my wife."

Rising, defense counsel said, "Your Honor, I object to being characterized as a two-bit shyster."

Smiling smugly Furter said, "Prosecution will gladly stipulate that learned counsel charges fees much in excess of two bits."

A mild titter arose among Furter's fans but was quelled by a glower from the judge. "Enough of the repartee already. Let's get on with the case."

The D.A. turned back to the witness. "Now, when you inquired as to the whereabouts of your wife, just what happened?"

"He wouldn't tell me. But he looked mighty suspicious and so did that murderess."

Before objection could be made the judge looked at his watch and remarked, "It's almost eleven thirty and time for lunch. Court stands adjourned till two o'clock."

At lunch Saul Chicken said, "You're licked, Terry. Better throw in the towel. Have Bella plead guilty to womanslaughter and she'll get off with thirty years—they'd never send such a pretty girl to the gas chamber."

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"No, Saul, I'm a fighter Besides, my clients are always innocent and Bella may very well be the most innocent and virtuous woman in all history."

"Your loyalty," said Saul, "is commendable. But it's obvious Bella was afraid that girl would take her job, so she stabbed her in an insane rage. Say, how about pleading insanity?"

"That," said the lawyer, "would be nutty. By the way, does Rocky Horse remind you of anybody?"

"Come to think of it he does. But I can't place him."

"Try to find out more about him, Saul. A husband ought to be Suspect Number One in any well-regulated murder mystery."

When court was resumed, Terry began his cross-examination of the surprise witness. "You say the victim was your wife?"

"Yes, and now I'm a widower, thanks to you."

"You're welcome, I'm sure. Now tell me, was it your wife's habit to go around in the nude?"

Furter jumped up and cried, "I object, your Honor. The question is irrelevant, immaterial, and immoral."

"No, it isn't—we want the bare facts," roared the judge.

The witness turned to the bench, explaining, "She was rehearsing for a play called 'Beard' and didn't have time to change from her stage costume before she went to this lawyer's office—and to her doom." While he was talking, Saul slipped a note to Terry who read it thoughtfully, then moved closer to the witness stand.

"Now, Mr. Horse, have people ever told you you look like a movie star?"

The D.A. was immediately on his feet shouting, "I object! That isn't part of the *res gestae* or even the *caveat emptor*. Counsel is just trying some of the old razzle-dazzle!"

"We need some of the old razzle-dazzle," said the judge. "Objection overruled. Witness will answer."

Preening and showing his profile to the jury, Rocky Horse purred, "It's immodest of me to say so but since I'm under oath I must admit that I'm frequently likened to a certain movie star."

"Isn't it true that you tried to break into pictures and failed?"

"No, not failed. They botched my screen test."

"Do you deny that you were madly jealous of your wife's success as a star of 'Beard'?"

"She wasn't a star," snarled the witness. "She was barely a walk-on."

Terry paused, noting the increasing discomfiture of the witness whose gorge was rising, whose suavity had left him, and whose permanent-press suit was beginning to wrinkle. The attorney

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spoke softly, "By the way, you gave your name as Rocky. Is that what your wife called you?"

"Certainly. It's my name."

"But didn't she have a pet name for you?"

"N-no."

"No? Remember, you're under oath—Bela."

The man leaped from the witness box, his face suffused with rage. With clutching fingers he tried to strangle the defense lawyer as he screamed, "Nobody calls me that—and lives!"

Terry stepped deftly aside as court attendants rushed up to restrain the violent witness. Franklin Furter winced as if he'd been stung by a bee. He had.

Back in the office, Terry explained to Bella and Saul. "Rocky Horse has confessed. He hid in the law library and taunted Dove that she'd never make it as a confidential secretary because of her poor spelling. She got back at him by calling him 'Bela' and that was like waving a red flag at a bull. You see, nobody would hire him to play a movie hero because he looked too much like Bela Lugosi, a villain.

"I knew from the first that he resembled somebody, but I just couldn't place him. I only thought of Boris Karloff, Peter Lorre, and Lon Chaney. It was Saul who supplied the main clue."

"Mere routine," shrugged the modest detective. "I took his photo around and showed it to people who watch the Late, Late, Late Show and they all said, 'Why, that looks like Bela Lugosi.'"

"After that," said Terry, "it was mere child's play to figure out that when the victim wrote 'Bella kilt me' she meant 'Bela killed me.' Her poor spelling threw us off."

"But that doesn't explain," said Saul, "how your charming secretary's fingerprints got on the murder weapon."

Blushing, Bella Boulevard whispered, "Forgive me, Chief, but I thought you had stabbed her. In self-defense, of course. I thought she had made—er—improper advances. So I tried to remove the incriminating Indonesian dagger letter-opener, but I couldn't budge it."

The Chief patted her hand and said, "You are the loyalest, truest, bravest secretary anybody ever had. A man couldn't ask for a finer companion with whom to walk down life's highway and—"

"Oh, boy!" thought Bella. "At last he's going to pop the question!" But a ringing phone interrupted. Automatically she picked up the receiver; then, turning to Terry, she reported, "There's a Mr. E. S. Gardner on the line. He wants to know if you'll handle the Case of the Pipsqueak Plagiarist."

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Winner of a SECOND PRIZE in the CWA contest

P. D. JAMES

In his "Criminals at Large" column in "The New York Times Book Review" of June 29, 1969, Allen J. Hubin began his weekly reviews as follows: "With some notable exceptions—several novels and a recent collection of short stories by Isaac Asimov, for example—the blending of detective elements with science fiction (as opposed to fantasy) is an art seldom practiced, and still far from full development. This is in part due to a sizable difficulty: avoiding the temptation to solve a baffling crime by whisking a batch of hypothetical science from under the Venusian carpet." Then Mr. Hubin went on to think—to hope—that soon there will be "more of this wedding of genres."

Now, we don't pretend—never have pretended—to be experts in this marriage of genres; indeed, critics (and readers) have taken us sharply to task for some of the detective-sciencefiction selections we have published in EQMM. Well, here is such a "wedding of genres" by P. D. James, and all we ask of Mr. Hubin is: How are we doing? Better? . . .

MURDER, 1986

by P. D. JAMES

THE GIRL LAY NAKED ON THE bed with a knife through her heart. That was the one simple and inescapable fact. No, not simple. It was a fact horrible in its complications. Sergeant Dolby, fighting nausea, steadied his shaking thighs against the foot of the bed and forced his mind into coherence—arranging his thoughts in order, like a child piling brick on colored brick and

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holding its breath against the inevitable tumble into chaos. He mustn't panic. He must take things slowly. There was a proper procedure laid down for this kind of crisis. There was a procedure laid down for everything.

Dead. That, at least, was certain. Despite the heat of the June morning the slim girlish body was quite cold, the rigor mortis already well advanced in face and arms. What had they taught him in Detective School about the onset of rigor mortis, that inexorable if erratic stiffening of the muscles, the body's last protest against disintegration and decay? He couldn't remember. He had never been any good at the more academic studies. He had been lucky to be accepted for the Criminal Investigation Department; they had made that clear enough to him at the time. They had never ceased to make it clear. A lost car; a small breaking and entering; a purse snatch. Send Dolby. He had never rated anything more interesting or important than the petty crimes of inadequate men. If it was something no one else wanted to be bothered with, send Dolby. If it was something the C.I.D. would rather not be told about, send Dolby.

And that was exactly how this death would rate. He would have to report it, of course. But it wouldn't be popular news at Headquarters. They were overworked already, depleted in strength, inadequately equipped, forced even to employ him six years after his normal retirement age. No, they wouldn't exactly welcome this spot of trouble. And the reason, as if he didn't know it, was fixed there on the wall for him to read. The statutory notice was pasted precisely over the head of her bed.

He wondered why she had chosen that spot. There was no rule about where it had to be displayed. Why, he wondered, had she chosen to sleep under it as people once slept under a Crucifix. An affirmation? But the wording was the same as he would find on the notice in the downstairs hall, in the elevator, on every corridor wall, in every room in the Colony. The Act to which it referred was already two years old.

PRESERVATION OF THE RACE ACT—1984

Control of Interplanetary Disease Infection Carriers

All registered carriers of the Disease, whether or not they are yet manifesting symptoms, are required under Section 2 of the above Act to conform to the following regulations . . .

He didn't need to read further. He knew the regulations by heart—the rules by which the Ip-

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dics lived, if you could call it living. The desperate defense of the few healthy against the menace of the many condemned. The small injustices which might prevent the greatest injustice of all, the extinction of man. The stigmata of the Diseased: the registered number tattooed on the left forearm; the regulation Ipdic suit of yellow cotton in summer, blue serge in winter; the compulsory sterilization, since an Ipdic bred only monsters; the rule prohibiting marriage or any close contact with a Normal; the few manual jobs they were permitted to do; the registered Colonies where they were allowed to live.

He knew what they would say at Headquarters. If Dolby had to discover a murder, it would have to be of an Ipdic. And trust him to be fool enough to report it.

But there was no hurry. He could wait until he was calmer, until he could face with confidence whomever they chose to send. And there were things they would expect him to have noticed. He had better make an examination of the scene before he reported. Then, even if they came at once, he would have something sensible to say.

He forced himself to look again at the body. She was lying on her back, eyes closed as if asleep, light brown hair streaming over the pillow. Her arms were crossed over her chest as if in a last innocent gesture of modesty. Below the left breast the handle of a knife stuck out like an obscene horn.

He bent low to examine it. An ordinary handle, probably an ordinary knife. A short-bladed kitchen knife of the kind used to peel vegetables. Her right palm was curved around it, but not touching it, as if about to pluck it out. On her left forearm the registered Ipdic number glowed almost luminous against the delicate skin.

She was neatly covered by a single sheet pulled smooth and taut so that it looked as if the body had been ritually prepared for examination—an intensification of the horror. He did not believe that this childish hand could have driven in the blade with such precision or that, in her last spasms, she had drawn the sheet so tidily over her nakedness. The linen was only a shade whiter than her skin. There had been two months now of almost continuous sunshine. But this body had been muffled in the high-necked tunic and baggy trousers of an Ipdic suit. Only her face had been open to the sun. It was a delicate nut-brown and there was a faint spatter of freckles across the forehead.

He walked slowly around the room. It was sparsely furnished but pleasant enough. The world had no shortage of living space,

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even for Ipdics. They could live in comfort, even in some opulence, until the electricity, the television, the domestic computer, the micro-oven broke down. Then these things remained broken. The precious skills of electricians and engineers were not wasted on Ipdics. And it was extraordinary how quickly squalor could replace luxury.

A breakdown of electricity in a building like this could mean no hot food, no light, no heating. He had known Ipdics who had frozen or starved to death in apartments which, back in 1980, only six years ago, must have cost a fortune to rent. Somehow the will to survive died quickly in them. It was easier to wrap themselves in blankets and reach for that small white capsule so thoughtfully provided by the Government, the simple painless way out which the whole healthy community was willing for them to take.

But this girl, this female Ipdic PXN 07926431, wasn't living in squalor. The apartment was clean and almost obsessively neat. The micro-oven was out of order, but there was an old-fashioned electric cooker in the kitchen and when he turned it on the hot plate glowed red. There were even a few personal possessions—a little clutch of seashells carefully arranged on the window ledge, a Staffordshire porcelain figurine of a shepherdess, a child's tea service on a papier-mâché tray.

Her yellow Ipdic suit was neatly folded over the back of a chair. He took it up and saw that she had altered it to fit her. The darts under the breasts had been taken in, the side seams carefully shaped. The hand stitching was neat and regular, an affirmation of individuality, of self-respect. A proud girl. A girl undemoralized by hopelessness. He turned the harsh cotton over and over in his hands and felt the tears stinging the back of his eyes.

He knew that this strange and half-remembered sweetness was pity. He let himself feel it, willing himself not to shrink from the pain. Just so, in his boyhood, he had tentatively placed his full weight on an injured leg after football, relishing the pain in the knowledge that he could bear it, that he was still essentially whole.

But he must waste no more time. Turning on his pocket radio he made his report.

"Sergeant Dolby here. I'm speaking from Ipdic Colony 865. Female Ipdic PXN 07926431 found dead. Room 18. Looks like murder."

It was received as he had expected.

"Oh, God! Are you sure? All right. Hang around. Someone will be over."

While he waited he gave his

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attention to the flowers. They had struck his senses as soon as he opened the door of the room, but the first sight of the dead girl had driven them from his mind. Now he let their gentle presence drift back into his consciousness. She had died amid such beauty.

The apartment was a bower of wild flowers, their delicate sweetness permeating the warm air so that every breath was an intimation of childhood summers, an evocation of the old innocent days. Wild flowers were his hobby. The slow brain corrected itself, patiently, mechanically: wild flowers had been his hobby. But that was before the Sickness, when the words flower and beauty seemed to have meaning. He hadn't looked at a flower with any joy since 1980.

1980. The year of the Disease. The year with the hottest summer for 21 years. That summer when the sheer weight of people had pressed against the concrete bastions of the city like an intolerable force, had thronged its burning pavements, had almost brought its transport system to a stop, had sprawled in checkered ranks across its parks until the sweet grass was pressed into pale straw.

1980. The year when there were too many people. Too many happy, busy, healthy human beings. The year when his wife had been alive; when his daughter Tessa had been alive. The year when brave men, traveling far beyond the moon, had brought back to earth the Sickness—the Sickness which had decimated mankind on every continent of the globe. The Sickness which had robbed him, Arthur Dolby, of his wife and daughter.

Tessa. She had been only 14 that spring. It was a wonderful age for a daughter, the sweetest daughter in the world. And Tessa had been intelligent as well as sweet. Both women in his life, his wife and daughter, had been cleverer than Dolby. He had known it, but it hadn't worried him or made him feel inadequate. They had loved him so unreservedly, had relied so much on his manhood, been so satisfied with what little he could provide. They had seen in him qualities he could never discern in himself, virtues which he knew he no longer possessed. His flame of life was meagre; it had needed their warm breaths to keep it burning bright. He wondered what they would think of him now. Arthur Dolby in 1986, looking once more at wild flowers.

He moved among them as if in a dream, like a man recognizing with wonder a treasure given up for lost. There had been no attempt at formal arrangement. She had obviously made use of any suitable container in the apartment and had bunched the plants together naturally and simply,

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each with its own kind. He could still identify them. There were brown earthenware jars of Herb Robert, the rose-pink flowers set delicately on their reddish stems. There were cracked teacups holding bunches of red clover meadow buttercups, and long-stemmed daisies; jam jars of white campion and cuckoo flowers; egg cups of birdsfoot trefoil—"eggs and bacon," Tessa used to call it—and even smaller jars of rueleaved saxifrage and the soft pink spurs of haresfoot. But, above all, there were the tall vases of cow-parsley, huge bunches of strong hollow-grooved stems supporting their umbels of white flowers, delicate as bridal lace, yet pungent and strong, shedding a white dust on the table, bed, and floor.

And then, in the last jar of all, the only one which held a posy of mixed flowers, he saw the Lady Orchid. It took his breath away. There it stood, alien and exotic, lifting its sumptuous head proudly among the common flowers of the roadside, the white clover, campion, and sweet wild roses. The Lady Orchid. *Orchis Purpurea.*

He stood very still and gazed at it. The decorative spike rose from its shining foliage, elegant and distinctive, seeming to know its rarity. The divisions of the helmet were wine-red, delicately veined and spotted with purple, their somber tint setting off the clear white beauty of the lip. The Lady Orchid. Dolby knew of only one spot, the fringe of a wood in old Kent County in the Southeast Province, where this flower grew wild. The Sickness had changed the whole of human life. But he doubted if it had changed that.

It was then that he heard the roar of the helicopter. He went to the window. The red machine, like a huge angry insect, was just bouncing down onto the roof landing pad. He watched, puzzled. Why should they send a chopper? Then he understood. The tall figure in the all-white uniform with its gleaming braid swung himself down from the cockpit and was lost to view behind the parapet of the roof. But Dolby recognized at once that helmet of black hair, the confident poise of the head. C. J. Kalvert. The Commissioner of the Home Security Force in person.

He told himself that it couldn't be true—that Kalvert wouldn't concern himself with the death of an Ipdic, that he must have some other business in the Colony. But what business? Dolby waited in fear, his hands clenched so that the nails pierced his palms, waited in an agony of hope that it might not be true. But it was true. A minute later he heard the strong footsteps advancing along the corridor. The door opened.

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The Commissioner had arrived.

He nodded an acknowledgement to Dolby and, without speaking, went over to the bed. For a moment he stood in silence, looking down at the girl. Then he said, "How did you get in, Sergeant?"

The accent was on the third word.

"The door was unlocked, sir."

"Naturally. Ipdics are forbidden to lock their doors. I was asking what you were doing here."

"I was making a search, sir."

That at least was true. He had been making a private search.

"And you discovered that one more female Ipdic had taken the sensible way out of her troubles. Why didn't you call the Sanitary Squad? It's unwise to leave a body longer than necessary in this weather. Haven't we all had enough of the stench of decay?"

"I think she was murdered, sir."

"Do you indeed, Sergeant. And why?"

Dolby moistened his dry lips and made his cramped fingers relax. He mustn't let himself be intimidated, mustn't permit himself to get flustered. The important thing was to stick to the facts and present them cogently.

"It's the knife, sir. If she were going to stab herself, I think she would have fallen on the blade, letting her weight drive it in. Then the body would have been found face downwards. That way, the blade would have done all the work. I don't think she would have had the strength or the skill to pierce her heart lying in that position. It looks almost surgical. It's too neat. The man who drove that knife in knew what he was doing. And then there's the sheet. She couldn't have placed it over herself so neatly."

"A valid point, Sergeant. But the fact that someone considerately tidied her up after death doesn't necessarily mean that he killed her. Anything else?"

He was walking restlessly about the room as he talked, touching nothing, his hands clasped behind his back. Dolby wished that he would stand still. He said, "But why use a knife at all, sir? She must have been issued her euthanasia capsule."

"Not a very dramatic way to go, Dolby. The commonest door for an Ipdic to let life out. She may have exercised a feminine preference for a more individualistic death. Look around this room, Sergeant. Does she strike you as having been an ordinary girl?"

No, she hadn't struck Dolby as ordinary. But this was ground he dare not tread. He said doggedly, "And why should she be naked, sir? Why take all her clothes off to kill herself?"

"Why, indeed. That shocks you, does it, Dolby? It implies an

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unpleasant touch of exhibitionism. It offends your modesty. But perhaps she was an exhibitionist. The flowers would suggest it. She made her room into a bower of fragrance and beauty. Then, naked, as unencumbered as the flowers, she stretched herself out like a sacrifice, and drove a knife through her heart. Can you, Sergeant, with your limited imagination, understand that a woman might wish to die like that?"

Kalvert swung round and strode over to him. The fierce black eyes burned into Dolby's. The Sergeant felt frightened, at a loss. The conversation was bizarre. He felt they were playing some private game, but that only one of them knew the rules.

What did Kalvert want of him? In a normal world, in the world before the Sickness when the old police force was at full strength, the Commissioner wouldn't even have known that Dolby existed. Yet here they both were, engaged, it seemed, in some private animus, sparring over the body of an unimportant dead Ipdic.

It was very hot in the room now and the scent of the flowers had been growing stronger. Dolby could feel the beads of sweat on his brow. Whatever happened he must hold on to the facts. He said, "The flowers needn't be funeral flowers. Perhaps they were for a celebration."

"That would suggest the presence of more than one person. Even Ipdics don't celebrate alone. Have you found any evidence that someone was with her when she died?"

He wanted to reply, "Only the knife in her breast." But he was silent. Kalvert was pacing the room again. Suddenly he stopped and glanced at his watch. Then, without speaking, he turned on the television. Dolby remembered. Of course. The Leader was due to speak after the midday news. It was already 12:32. He would be almost finished.

The screen flickered and the too familiar face appeared. The Leader looked very tired. Even the makeup artist hadn't been able to disguise the heavy shadows under the eyes or the hollows beneath the cheekbones. With that beard and the melancholy, pain-filled face, he looked like an ascetic prophet. But he always had. His face hadn't changed much since the days of his student protest. People said that, even then, he had only really been interested in personal power. Well, he was still under thirty, but he had it now. All the power he could possibly want. The speech was nearly over.

"And so we must find our own solution. We have a tradition in this country of humanity and justice. But how far can we let tradition hamper us in the great

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task of preserving our race? We know what is happening in other countries, the organized and ceremonial mass suicides of thousands of Ipdics at a time, the humane Disposal Squads, the compulsory matings between computer-selected Normals. Some compulsory measures against the Ipdics we must now take. As far as possible we have relied on gentle and voluntary methods. But can we afford to fall behind while other less scrupulous nations are breeding faster and more selectively, disposing of their Ipdics, re-establishing their technology, looking with covetous eyes at the great denuded spaces of the world. One day they will be repopulated. It is our duty to take part in this great process. The world needs our race. The time has come for every one of us, particularly our Ipdics, to ask ourselves with every breath we draw: have I the right to be alive?"

Kalvert turned off the set.

"I think we can forego the pleasure of seeing once again Mrs. Sartori nursing her fifth healthy daughter. Odd to think that the most valuable human being in the world is a healthy fecund female. But you got the message I hope, Sergeant. This Ipdic had the wisdom to take her own way out while she still had a choice. And if somebody helped her, who are we to quibble?"

"It was still murder, sir. I know that killing an Ipdic isn't a capital crime. But the Law hasn't been altered yet. It's still a felony to kill any human being."

"Ah, yes. A felony. And you, of course, are dedicated to the detection and punishment of felonies. The first duty of a policeman is to prevent crime; the second is to detect and punish the criminal. You learned all that when you were in Detective School, didn't you? Learned it all by heart. I remember reading the first report on you, Dolby. It was almost identical with the last. 'Lacking in initiative. Deficient in imagination. Tends to make errors of judgment. Should make a reliable subordinate. Lacks self-confidence.' But it did admit that, when you manage to get an idea into your head, it sticks there. And you have an idea in your head. Murder. And murder is a felony. Well, what do you propose to do about it?"

"In cases of murder the body is first examined by the forensic pathologist."

"Not this body, Dolby. Do you know how many pathologists this country now has? We have other uses for them than to cut up dead Ipdics. She was a young female. She was not pregnant. She was stabbed through the heart. What more do we need to know?"

"Whether or not a man was with her before she died."

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"I think you can take it there was. Male Ipdics are not yet being sterilized. So we add another fact. She probably had a lover. What else do you want to know?"

"Whether or not there are prints on the knife, sir, and, if so, whose they are."

Kalvert laughed aloud. "We were short of forensic scientists before the Sickness. How many do you suppose we have now? There was another case of capital murder reported this morning. An Ipdic has killed his former wife because she obeyed the Law and kept away from him. We can't afford to lose a single healthy woman, can we, Dolby? There's the rumor of armed bands of Ipdics roaming the Southeast Province. There's the case of the atomic scientist with the back of his skull smashed in. A scientist, Dolby! Now, do you really want to bother the lab with this petty trouble?"

Dolby said obstinately, "I know that someone was with her when she picked the flowers. That must have been yesterday—they're still fresh even in this heat, and wild flowers fade quickly. I think he probably came back here with her and was with her when she died."

"Then find him, Sergeant, if you must. But don't ask for help I can't give."

He walked over to the door without another glance at the room or at the dead girl, as if neither of them held any further interest for him. Then he turned: "You aren't on the official list of men encouraged to breed daughters in the interest of the race, are you, Sergeant?"

Dolby wanted to reply that he once had a daughter. She was dead and he wanted no other.

"No, sir. They thought I was too old. And then there was the adverse psychologist's report."

"A pity. One would have thought that the brave new world could have made room for just one or two people who were unintelligent, lacking in imagination, unambitious, inclined to errors of judgment. People will persist in going their own obstinate way. Goodbye, Dolby. Report to me personally on this case, will you? I shall be interested to hear how you progress. Who knows, you may reveal unsuspected talents."

He was gone. Dolby waited for a minute as if to cleanse his mind of that disturbing presence. As the confident footsteps died away, even the room seemed to settle itself into peace. Then Dolby began the few tasks with still remained.

They weren't many. First, he took the dead girl's fingerprints. He worked with infinite care, murmuring to her as he gently pressed the pad against each fingertip, like a doctor reassuring a child. It would be pointless,

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he thought, to compare them with the prints on any of the ordinary objects in the room. That would prove nothing except that another person had been there. The only prints of importance would be those on the knife. But there were no prints on the knife—only an amorphous smudge of whorls and composites as if someone had attempted to fold her hand around the shaft but had lacked the courage to press the fingers firm.

But the best clue was still there—the Lady Orchid, splendid in its purity and beauty, the flower which told him where she had spent the previous day, the flower which might lead him to the man who had been with her. And there was another clue, something he had noticed when he had first examined the body closely. He had said nothing to Kalvert. Perhaps Kalvert hadn't noticed it or hadn't recognized its significance. Perhaps he had been cleverer than Kalvert. He told himself that he wasn't really as stupid as people sometimes thought. It was just that his mind was so easily flustered into incoherence when stronger men bullied or taunted him. Only his wife and daughter had really understood that, had given him the confidence to fight it.

It was time to get started. They might deny him the services of the pathologist and the laboratory, but they still permitted him the use of his car. It would be little more than an hour's drive.

But, before leaving, he bent once more over the body. The Disposal Squad would soon be here for it. He would never see it again. So he studied the clue for the last time—the faint, almost imperceptible circle of paler skin round the third finger of her left hand. The finger that could have worn a ring through the whole of a hot summer day . . .

He drove through the wide streets and sun-filled squares, through the deserted suburbs, until the tentacles of the city fell away and he was in open country. The roads were pitted and unmended, the hedges high and unkempt, the fields a turbulent sea of vegetation threatening to engulf the unpeopled farmlands. But the sun was pleasant on his face. He could almost persuade himself that this was one of the old happy jaunts into the familiar and well-loved countryside of Old Kent.

He had crossed the boundary into the Southeast Province and was already looking for the remembered landmarks of hillside and church spire when it happened. There was an explosion, a crack like a pistol shot, and the windshield shattered in his face. He felt splinters of glass stinging his cheeks. Instinctively he guarded his face with his arms. The

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car swerved out of control and lurched onto the grass verge. He felt for the ignition key and turned off the engine. Then he tentatively opened his eyes. They were uninjured. And it was then he saw the Ipdics.

They came out of the opposite ditch and moved toward him, with stones still in their hands. There were half a dozen of them. One, the tallest, seemed to be their leader. The others shuffled at his heels, lumpy figures in their ill-fiting yellow suits, their feet brown and bare, their hair matted like animals', their greedy eyes fixed on the car. They stood still, looking at him. And then the leader drew his right hand from behind his back, and Dolby saw that it held a gun.

His heart missed a beat. So it was true! Somehow the Ipdics were getting hold of weapons. He got out of the car, trying to recall the exact instructions of such an emergency. Never show f e a r. Keep calm. Exert authority. Remember that they are inferior, unorganized, easily cowed. Never drop your eyes. But his voice, even to him, sounded feeble, pitched unnaturally high.

"The possession of a weapon by an Ipdic is a capital crime. The punishment is death. Give me that gun."

The voice that replied was quiet, authoritative, the kind of voice one used to call educated.

"No. First you give me the keys to the car. Then I give you something in return. A cartridge in your belly!"

His followers cackled their appreciation. It was one of the most horrible sounds in the world—the laughter of an Ipdic.

The Ipdic pointed the gun at Dolby, moving it slowly from side to side as if selecting his precise target. He was enjoying his power, drunk with elation and triumph. But he waited a second too long. Suddenly his arm jerked upward, the gun leaped from his grasp, and he gave one high desolate scream, falling into the dust of the road. He was in the first spasm of an Ipdic fit. His body writhed and twisted, arched and contracted, until the bones could be heard snapping.

Dolby looked on impassively. There was nothing he could do. He had seen it thousands of times before. It had happened to his wife, to Tessa, to all those who had died of the disease. It happened in the end to every Ipdic. It would have happened to that girl on the bed, at peace now with a knife in her heart.

The attack would leave this Ipdic broken and exhausted. If he survived, he would be a mindless idiot, probably for months. And then the fits would come more frequently. It was this feature of the Disease which made the Ipdics so impossible to train or employ,

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even for the simplest of jobs.

Dolby walked up to the writhing figure and kicked away the gun, then picked it up. It was a revolver, a Smith and Wesson .38, old but in good condition. He saw that it was loaded. After a second's thought he slipped it into the pocket of his jacket.

The reamining Ipdics had disappeared, scrambling back into the hedges with cries of anguish and fear. The whole incident was over so quickly that it already seemed like a dream. Only the tortured figure in the dust and the cold metal in his pocket were witnesses to its reality. He should report it at once, of course. The suppression of armed Ipdics was the first duty of the Home Security Force.

He backed the car onto the road. Then, on an impulse, he got out again and went over to the Ipdic. He bent to drag the writhing figure off the road and into the shade of the hedge. But it was no good. Revolted, he drew back. He couldn't bear to touch him. Perhaps the Ipdic's friends would creep back later to carry him away and tend to him. Perhaps. But he, Dolby, had his own problem. He had a murder to solve.

Fifteen minutes later he drove slowly through the village. The main street was deserted but he could glimpse, through the open cottage doors, the garish yellow of an Ipdic suit moving in the dim interior and he could see other yellow-clad figures bending at work in the gardens and fields. None of them looked up as he passed. He guessed that this was one of the settlements which had grown up in the country, where groups of Ipdics attempted to support themselves and each other, growing their own food, nursing their sick, burying their dead. Since they made no demands on the Normals they were usually left in peace. But it couldn't last long. There was no real hope for them.

As more and more of them were overtaken by the last inevitable symptoms, the burden on those left grew intolerable. Soon they too would be helpless and mad. Then the Security Force, the Health Authorities, and the Sanitary Squads would move in, and another colony of the dispossessed would be cleaned up. And it was a question of cleaning up. Dolby had taken part in one such operation. He knew what the final horror would be. But now in the heat of this sun-scented afternoon, he might be driving through the village as he had known it in the days before the Sickness, prosperous, peaceful, sleepy, with the men still busy on the farms.

He left the car at the churchyard gate and slipping the

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strap of his murder bag over his shoulder, walked up the dappled avenue of elms to the south entrance. The heavy oak door with its carved panels, its massive hinges of hammered iron creaked open at his touch. He stepped into the cool dimness and smelled again the familiar scent of flowers, musty hymn books, and wood polish, saw once again the medieval pillars soaring high to the hammer beams of the roof, and, straining his eyes through the dimness he glimpsed the carving on the rood screen and the far gleam of the sanctuary lamp.

The church was full of wild flowers. They were the same flowers as those in the dead girl's apartment but here their frail delicacy was almost lost against the massive pillars and the richly carved oak. But the huge vases of cow-parsley set on each side of the chancel steps made a brave show, floating like twin clouds of whiteness in the dim air. It was a church decked for a bride.

He saw a female Ipdic polishing the brass lectern. He made his way up the aisle toward her and she beamed a gentle welcome as if his appearance were the most ordinary event in the world. Her baggy Ipdic suit was stained with polish and she wore a pair of old sandals, the soles peeling away from the uppers. Her graying hair was drawn back into a loose bun from which wisps of hair had escaped to frame the anxious, sun-stained face.

She reminded him of someone. He let his mind probe once again, painfully, into the past. Then he remembered. Of course. Miss Caroline Martin, his Sunday School superintendent. It wasn't she, of course. Miss Martin would have been over 70 at the time of the Sickness. No one as old as that had survived, except those few Tasmanian aborigines who so interested the scientists. Miss Martin, standing beside the old piano as her younger sister thumped out the opening hymn and beating time with her gloved hand as if hearing some private and quite different music. Afterward, the students had gone to their different classes and had sat in a circle around their teachers. Miss Martin had taught the older children, himself among them. Some of the boys had been unruly, but never Arthur Dolby. Even in those days he had been obedient, law-abiding. The good boy. Not particularly bright, but well-behaved. Good, dull, ineffectual. Teacher's pet.

And when she spoke it was with a voice like Miss Martin's.

"Can I help you? If you've come for Evensong services, I'm afraid it isn't until five thirty today. If you're looking for Father Reeves, he's at the Rectory. But perhaps you're just a visitor. It's a lovely church, isn't it? Have

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you seen our sixteenth-century reredos?"

"I hoped I would be in time for the wedding."

She gave a little girlish cry of laughter.

"Dear me, you are late! I'm afraid that was yesterday! But I thought no one was supposed to know about it. Father Reeves said that it was to be quite secret really. But I'm afraid I was very naughty. I did so want to see the bride. After all, we haven't had a wedding here since—"

"Since the Act?"

She corrected him gently, like Miss Martin rebuking the good boy of the class.

"Since 1980. So yesterday was quite an occasion for us. And I did want to see what the bride looked like in Emma's veil."

"In what?"

"A bride has to have a veil, you know." She spoke with gentle reproof, taking pity on his masculine ignorance. "Emma was my niece. I lost her and her parents in 1981. Emma was the last bride to be married here. That was on April 28, 1980. I've always kept her veil and headdress. She was such a lovely bride."

Dolby asked with sudden harshness the irrelevant but necessary question.

"What happened to her bridegroom?"

"Oh, John was one of the lucky ones. I believe he has married again and has three daughters. Just one daughter more and they'll be allowed to have a son. We don't see him, of course. It wasn't to be expected. After all, it is the Law."

How despicable it was, this need to be reassured that there were other traitors.

"Yes," he said. "It is the Law."

She began polishing the already burnished lectern, chatting to him as she worked.

"But I've kept Emma's veil and headdress. So I thought I'd just place them on a chair beside the font so that this new bride would see them when she came into church. Just in case she wanted to borrow them, you know. And she did. I was so glad. The bridegroom placed the veil over her head and fixed the headdress for her himself, and she walked up the aisle looking so beautiful."

"Yes," said Dolby. "She would have looked very beautiful."

"I watched them from behind this pillar. Neiither of them noticed me. But it was right for me to be here. There ought to be someone in the church. It says in the prayer book, 'In the sight of God and of this congregation.' She had a small bouquet of wild flowers, just a simple mixed bunch but very charming. I think they must have picked it together."

"She carried a Lady Orchid," said Dolby. "A Lady Orchid picked by her bridegroom and

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surrounded by daisies, clover, white campion, and wild roses."

"How clever of you to guess! Are you a friend, perhaps?"

"No," said Dolby. "Not a friend. Can you describe the bridegroom?"

"I thought that you must know him. Very tall, very dark. He wore a plain white suit. Oh, they were such a handsome couple! I wished Father Reeves could have seen them."

"I thought he married them."

"So he did. But Father Reeves, poor man, is blind."

So that was why he risked it, thought Dolby. But what a risk!

"Which prayer book did he use?"

She gazed at him, the milky eyes perplexed. "Father Reeves?"

"No, the bridegroom. He did handle a prayer book, I suppose?"

"Oh, yes. I put one out for each of them. Father Reeves asked me to get things ready. It was I who decorated the church. Poor dears, it wasn't as if they could have the usual printed service sheets. Emma's were so pretty, her initials intertwined with the bridegroom's. But yesterday they had to use ordinary prayer books. I chose them specially from the pews and put them on the two prayer stools. I found a very pretty white one for the bride and this splendid old book with the brass clasp for the bridegroom. It looked masculine, I thought."

It lay on the book ledge of the front pew. She made a move to pick it up, but he shot out his hand. Then he dropped his handkerchief over the book and lifted it by the sharp edges of the binding. Brass and leather. Good for a print. And this man's palm would be moist, clammy, perhaps, with perspiration and fear. A hot day; an illegal ceremony; his mind on murder. To love and to cherish until death us do part. Yes, this bridegroom would have been nervous. But Dolby had one more question.

"How did they get here? Do you know?"

"They came by foot. At least, they walked up to the church together. I think they had walked quite a long way. They were quite hot and dusty when they arrived. But I know how they really came."

She nodded her unkempt head and gave a little conspiratorial nod.

"I've got very good ears, you know. They came by helicopter. I heard it."

A helicopter. He knew almost without thinking exactly who was permitted the use of a helicopter. Members of the Central Committee of Government; high ranking scientists and technicians; doctors; the Commissioner of the Home Security Force, and his Deputy. That was all.

He took the prayer book out

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into the sun and sat on one of the flat-topped gravestones. He set up the prayer book on its end, then unzipped his murder bag. His hands shook so that he could hardly manage the brush and some of the gray powder was spilt and blew away in the breeze. He willed himself to keep calm, to take his time. Carefully, like a child with a new toy, he dusted the book and clasp with powder gently blowing off the surplus with a small rubber nozzle. It was an old procedure, first p r a c t i c e d when he was a young Detective Constable. But it still worked. It always would. The arches, whorls, and composites came clearly into view.

He was right. It was a beautiful print. The man had made no effort to wipe it clean. Why should he? How could he imagine that this particular book would ever be identified among the many scattered around the church? How could he suspect that he would ever be traced to this despised and unregarded place? Dolby took out his camera and photographed the print. There must be continuity of evidence. He must leave no room for doubt. Then he classified its characteristics, ready for checking.

There was a little delay at the National Identification Computer Center when he phoned, and he had to wait his turn. When it came he gave his name, rank, secret code, and the classification of the print. There was a moment's silence. Then a surprised voice asked, "Is that you, Dolby? Will you confirm your code."

He did so. Another silence.

"Okay. But what on earth are you up to? Are you sure of your print classification?"

"Yes. I want the identification for elimination purposes."

"Then you can eliminate, all right. That's the Commissioner. Kalvert, C. J. Hard luck, Dolby! Better start again."

He switched off the receiver and sat in silence. He had known it, of course. But for how long? Perhaps from the b e g i n n i n g. Kalvert. Kalvert, who had an excuse for visiting an Ipdic Colony. Kalvert, who had the use of a helicopter. Kalvert, who h a d known without asking that the television set in her room was in working order. Kalvert, who had been too sure of himself to take the most elementary precautions against discovery, because he knew that it didn't matter, because he knew no one would dare touch him. Kalvert, one of the four most powerful men in the country. And it was he, the despised Sergeant Dolby, who had solved the case.

He heard the angry purr of the approaching h e l i c o p t e r without surprise. He had reported the armed attack by the Ipdics. It was certain that Headquarters

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would have immediately summoned a Squad from the nearest station to hunt them down. But Kalvert would know about the message. He had no doubt that the Commissioner was keeping a watch on him. He would know which way Dolby was heading, would realize that he was dangerously close to the truth. The armed Squad would be here in time. But Kalvert would arrive first.

He waited for five minutes, still sitting quietly on the gravestone. The air was sweet with the smell of grasses and vibrating with the high-treble midsummer chant of blackbird and thrush. He shut his eyes for a moment, breathing in the beauty, taking courage from its peace. Then he got to his feet and stood at the head of the avenue of elms to wait for Kalvert.

The gold braid on the all-white uniform gleamed in the sun. The tall figure, arrogant with confidence and power, walked unhesitatingly toward him, unsmiling, making no sign. When they were three feet apart, Kalvert stopped. They stood confronting each other. It was Dolby who spoke first. His voice was little more than a whisper.

"You killed her."

He could not meet Kalvert's eyes. But he heard his reply.

"Yes, I killed her. Shall I tell you about it, Sergeant? You seem to have shown some initiative. You deserve to know part of the truth. I was her friend. That is prohibited by Regulation. She became my mistress. That is against the Law. We decided to get married. That is a serious crime. I killed her. That, as you earlier explained, is a felony. And what are you going to do about it, Sergeant?"

Dolby couldn't speak. Suddenly he took out the revolver. It seemed ridiculous to point it at Kalvert. He wasn't even sure that he would be able to fire it. But he held it close to his side and the curved stock fitted comfortably to his palm, giving him courage. He made himself meet Kalvert's eyes, and heard the Commissioner laugh.

"To kill a Normal is also against the Law. But it's something more. Capital murder, Dolby. Is that what you have in mind?"

Dolby spoke out of cracked lips, "But why? *Why?*"

"I don't have to explain to you. But I'll try. Have you the imagination to understand that we might have loved each other, that I might have married her because it seemed a small risk for me and would give her pleasure, that I might have promised to kill her when her last symptoms began? Can you, Sergeant Dolby, enter into the mind of a girl like that? She was an Ipdic. And she was more alive in her condemned cell

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than you have ever been in your life. Female Ipdic PXN 07926431 found dead. Looks like murder. Remember how you reported it, Dolby? A felony. Something to be investigated. Against the Law. That's all it meant to you, isn't it?"

He had taken out his own revolver now. He held it easily, like a man casually dangling a familiar toy. He stood there, magnificent in the sunshine, the breeze lifting his black hair. He said quietly, "Do you think I'd let any Law on earth keep me from the woman I loved?"

Dolby wanted to cry out that it hadn't been like that at all. That Kalvert didn't understand. That he, Dolby, had cared about the girl. But the contempt in those cold black eyes kept him silent. There was nothing they could say to each other. Nothing. And Kalvert would kill him.

The Squad would be here soon. Kalvert couldn't let him live to tell his story. He gazed with fascinated horror at the revolver held so easily, so confidently, in the Commissioner's hand. And he tightened the grip on his own, feeling with a shaking finger for the trigger.

The armored car roared up to the churchyard gate. The Squad were here. Kalvert lifted his revolver to replace it in the holster. Dolby, misunderstanding the gesture, whipped up his own gun and, closing his eyes, fired until the last cartridge was spent. Numbed by misery and panic, he didn't hear the shots or the thud of Kalvert's fall. The first sound to pierce his consciousness was a wild screaming and beating of wings as the terrified birds flew high. Then he was aware of an unnatural silence, and of an acrid smell tainting the summer air.

His right hand ached. It felt empty, slippery with sweat. He saw that he had dropped the gun. There was a long mournful cry of distress. It came from behind him. He turned and glimpsed the yellow-clad figure of the female Ipdic, hand to her mouth, watching him from the shadow of the church. Then she faded back into the dimness.

He dropped on his knees beside Kalvert. The torn arteries were pumping their blood onto the white tunic. The crimson stain burst open like a flower. Dolby took off his jacket with shaking hands and thrust it under Kalvert's head. He wanted to say that he was sorry, to cry out like a child that he hadn't really meant it, that it was all a mistake.

Kalvert looked at him. Was there really pity in those dulling eyes? He was trying to speak. "Poor Dolby! Your final error of judgment."

The last word was hiccupped in a gush of blood. Kalvert turned his head away from Dolby and

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drew up his knees as if easing himself into sleep. And Dolby knew that it was too late to explain now, that there was no one there to hear him.

He stood up. The Squad were very close now, three of them, walking abreast, guns at hip, moving inexorably forward in the pool of their own shadows. And so he waited, all fear past, with Kalvert's body at his feet. And he thought for the last time of his daughter, Tessa, whom he had allowed to hide from him because that was the Law. Tessa, whom he had deserted and betrayed. Tessa, whom he had sought at last, but had found too late. Tessa, who had led him unwittingly to her lover and murderer. Tessa who would never have picked that Lady Orchid. Hadn't he taught her when she was a child that if you pick a wild orchid it can never bloom again?

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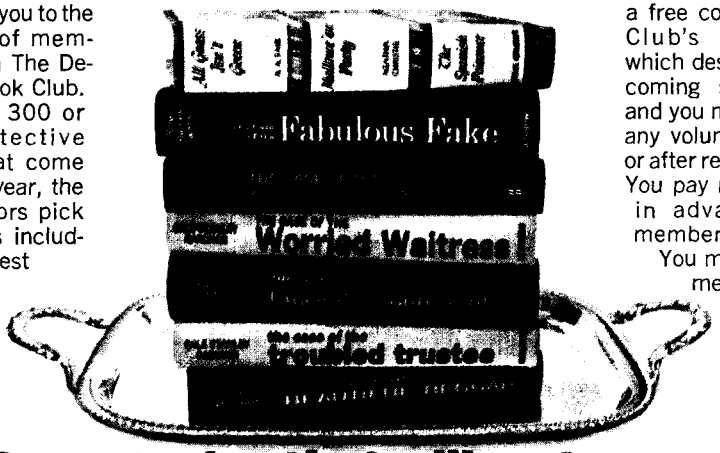

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